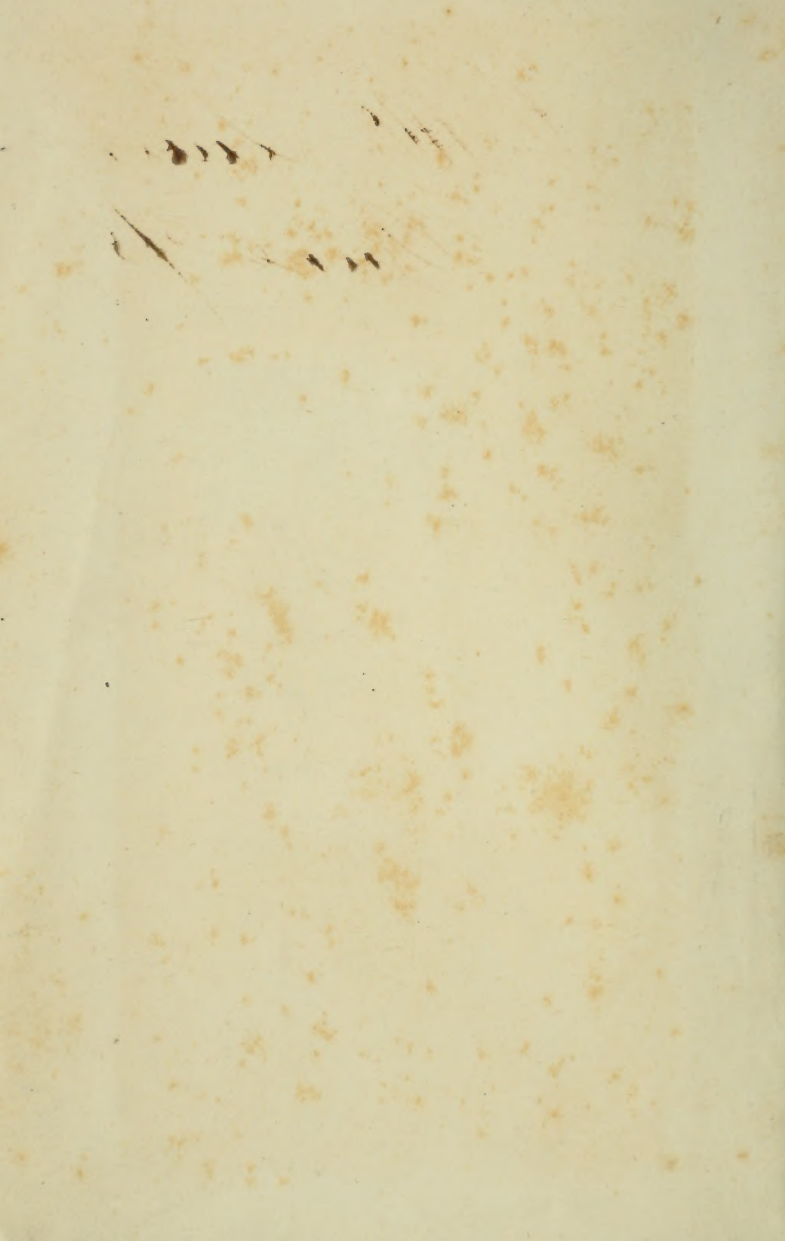


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ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

VOL. I.

ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

A STORY OF THE MINE

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE' 'HIRELL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

HENRY S. KING & Co.

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To the Right Honourable HENRY AUSTIN BRUCE, M.P.
Secretary of State for the Home Department.

SIR,

In asking your permission to dedicate to you the novel of 'Israel Mort, Overman,' permit me to give some explanation.


I am one of those who think they already see the advent of a time when our public men shall be judged not by the conspicuousness or power of their position—by the bias of friend or enemy—by party triumphs or failures—not even mainly by mere reforms of the instrument of legislation, however necessary—but by the actual use they have made of their opportunities to promote the social well-being of their humbler fellowmen, and especially of those who most urgently needed help.

When, Sir, that day comes, I venture to predict your name will be most gratefully remembered, in connection with the Act you succeeded in passing through Parliament, in spite of the most adverse influences; an act which in itself, or in its developments, will prove to be the miner's 'Magna Charta.'

I have the honour, Sir, to subscribe myself,

Your obedient Servant,

JOHN SAUNDERS.



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THE FIRST VOLUME.

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ISRAEL MORT.



INTRODUCTION.

BORROWING, for a few brief moments, the wand of the sorcerer Science, who can do what other sorcerers only promise—raise up the dead—what does Science show in connection with that particular spot of ground where lies the scene of the ensuing story?

The light, which almost needs some other word to express its inconceivable splendour, is at first too dazzling for the spirit-vision to see aught that it can comprehend.

And when the eye has grown accustomed to the fierce blaze of sunshine, and to its reflections in the vast and near mirror, the sea, the difficulties, while changing, grow rather than lessen.

It is a new world that is gazed on—a world in which all objects are strange, unfamiliar, and seem as unreal as a dream-picture—a world young, and revelling in its youth, and in all that youth can give it of beauty, strength, profusion, and riotous life.

Gradually this world, at first boundless as its sea and sky, narrows to the sight, and displays a forest rising from a lagoon, the water clear as crystal, and, where its colour can be seen, of the deepest blue.

A forest in which the grandeur and stately elegance of the palm-like and other lofty trees, the ideal perfection of loveliness in the tree-ferns and other low-growing plants, and the amazing fecundity of the exquisitely beautiful herbage, seem as nothing in comparison with the novelty of their forms and characters, or with the impressiveness of the fact that actual human eye has never gazed upon them, or their progeny of true lineal descent (some few fossilised forms only excepted); that they came into being—lived innumerable ages—and then died, innumerable ages before the earth knew man.

But our guide fails us. Before such a scene of enchantment Science itself cannot reveal worthily the traits of that primeval time, except by taking to its aid a still more potent auxiliary—Imagination. Thus only can it restore something of the infinite variety and of the wondrous structure of the vegetation.

The scaly, and embossed, and medallioned, and interval-ringed giant stems; the branches with their endless varieties of expression and foliage; the gorgeous flowers; the rich fruit-clusters; all more or less unknown to us now, but suggestively indicated by the petrified remains of the few forms that survive in that shape for our instruction and delight.

And so with the forms of animal, and insect, and bird, and fish, and reptile life, seen perched in the forest canopy, or winding about the tree trunks, or roaming with vast bulk, crashing as they go, through the dense jungle, or basking in the fierce heat of the direct sun-rays, or cooling themselves in the depth of the waters of the lagoon, with preposterous snouts just emerging from the surface.

It is the place and time for reptile and

amphibious life, strange, grotesque, monstrous! And with these, as with the plants, only the few, and these the least important in the scale of organisation, will survive, fossilised, for man to know.

Such is the picture indicated by Science and its ally. Our own eyes will help us to the contrast.

The broad lagoon has shrunk to a mere stream descending from the mountain heights to the sea.

The luxuriant, graceful, beauteous, and magnificent vegetable forms—above all, the palms and the tree-ferns, most exquisite perhaps of vegetable structures—where are they? All shrunk to the one unchanging garment of valley, hill-side, and mountain-top—the humble British fern.

But the dazzling light and glory around that lagoon, what have we in its place, to distinguish the existing dell?

Here is the actual picture of the place as it is—unexaggerated:

Where the centre of the lagoon was, is now a black, grimy, dismal hollow—a resting-place be-

tween the winding incline of the still beautiful valley above, and the rapid descent to the marshy plain and sea below.

Man is there ; but hardly to give new dignity to the scene of to-day, or to claim due honour for his labours in having changed what was even a century ago one of the loveliest of pastoral scenes into that we now gaze upon.

Men and boys are passing to their work in that blackened, grimy, bare-surfaced dell. Their hands are black, their faces are black, and ghastly through the unnatural glare thus given to the white of the eye. They look haggard, and for the most part are undersized. Their flannel garb is fast assuming the hue of all around.

Black sheds, with more important black buildings of brick, of all sizes and shapes and forms, always excepting any form in the least approximating to picturesqueness or beauty, are grouped in the centre.

Black pieces of new and old machinery, a chaos of iron engines and parts of engines, and beams and parts of beams, and wheels and parts of wheels, and boilers and parts of boilers, and a

hundred other unintelligible things, lie round the buildings, leaving here and there little oases of vegetation—that is to say, of grass—which, unable to turn black, has done the next most appropriate thing, and faded to a lurid yellow.

Black flying bridges high in the air unite building with building. Roads, with black mud, run beneath and between. Flights of black steps descend to the roads. A tall black chimney stands towering near.

Through the indescribable ugliness and pervading atmosphere of sordid squalor that at first glance characterises the place, three objects only stand out in pleasant relief:—the row of bright red fires beneath the engine-shed, the light pure colour of the stone quarry in the background, and the wheels that surmount the hideous scaffold-like structure, built of great beams of timber with up-rights, and a projecting angular arm from which hangs a massive rope of wire to support the heavy cage that is continually descending and ascending between the black world above and the still blacker one below.

These wheels are a study. They revolve in

opposite ways, they go at great speed, and are so close, side by side, that the resulting motion is to the eye something unique—charming in its suggestiveness and beauty. They literally twinkle : no other word can express their lovely and silent motion.

There is one other trait, for the moment forgotten. On the black sludgy bridge that leads to the deeper blackness of the pit mouth, a group of birds, some of them of rare beauty and song, are fearlessly hopping about between the very feet of the tram drivers. They are picking up grains of corn, and chattering, and quarrelling, and chirruping, as merrily as if they saw not the actual scene of to-day such as man has made it, but the pastoral one of a former century ; or even—if birds, like men, dream of a golden age—of the splendours of the still earlier primeval time, when Nature, as apart from man, was all in all.

See then the two aspects of the same locality ; the black mine of Cwm Aber, and the dazzling glory of the tropical forest and lagoon ! What is the meaning of so violent a contrast and change ?

Would it not be remarkable if it were the very

splendour and ashes of the dead beauty of the one era, that gives all its ugliness and discomfort to the other ?

Would it not be stranger still if out of this ugliness and discomfort should again come the very essences of the light, and warmth, and glory of that morning of the world ; colours which even that time could not outvie ; means of enhancing indefinitely human health, wealth, and happiness, in all sorts of ways ?

And as man is the author of all the degradation one sees here, so is he the hero who creates from it so much that is truly precious.

Man wants coal. He has accidentally discovered long ages ago how valuable a fuel it makes. He has eagerly sought for the store-houses of so precious a commodity. He has pertinaciously solicited Nature to give to him the keys.

She, on the contrary, appears to wish him to understand she has intentionally hidden away the coveted thing where he may never hope to get at it ; far down in the very bowels of the earth,

where human foot has never trod, where no form of life, however humble, can possibly exist.

Man heeds her not, except in so far as he may learn how to circumvent her. Having dug out whatever he can reach from the surface, he prepares boldly to follow the coal, whithersoever it may lead him, through any difficulties, any dangers, to any depth.

Learned men come to his help ; and by the study of the earth-rocks, where these happen to be broken through by some primeval convulsion, and exposed, as in great ravines, show him how to track the unseen mineral, step by step, till at a given point they say, ‘Strike down boldly there, and you will find it.’

He does so. He bores into the ground, sometimes through long, weary, and most anxious months of unremitting and unremunerative labour, perhaps to find there has been a deplorable miscalculation and waste ; but, if so, he only changes the arena where he means to fight out this great battle. He again ventures : and at last succeeds.

Who but those who have continually experienced the alternations of hope and despair can tell the deliciousness of the moment which brings the first tokens of such success—the little handful of coal that emerges from the boring-rod—not once, but continuously, through the space say of a couple of yards? Yes; the promised seam is there, is found at last; and no star-gazer ever looked on a new world discovered with greater exultation than the mining engineer looks upon the fragments of his earthly one; which now ensure reputation to him, wealth to the enterprising speculators, employment to hundreds of the needy, and a something of the glow and glory of the sun, from which all its virtue is derived, to innumerable hearths.

Yet Nature, with her sweet, impassive, sphinx-like countenance, still hostilely confronts him, and says, “Thus far and no farther.” Thou knowest. Be content with that, and with the fact thy knowledge has taught thee, that the treasure thou seekest lies hundreds of fathoms deep. Go. Leave me to the solitudes thou hast already too much disturbed.’

And how does man answer her? 'Where my boring-rods have gone, I too can go, and will.'

So he digs a great shaft down from the surface of the fern-clad soil, making its rounded sides into safe and strong walls at every step of the descent, until he can plant his foot at bottom firmly on the coal-bed; and thence look up as through an interminable chimney to where, diminished to a mere point of light, is the opening indicating the spot where he quitted the safeguards of mother earth.

Now then, surely he has only to strip, and dig away with a will, and be content! The strife is over. Nature owns defeat, and gives up the contest.

Ah no! The strife is now only beginning in its real intensity.

Water floods the bottom of the shaft, and threatens at once ruin to the works, and death to the workmen.

But this had been foreseen and provided for. Man has already erected his powerful engines, and stretched down his pumps, ever lengthening with the depth of the shaft, and now laughs at the idea

of inundation. With sublime audacity he mocks at Nature's law that makes water ever tend to go down ; he takes it, as it were, into his hands, even to the volume of a small river, and at once sends it flowing perpendicularly upwards to the surface, straighter than arrow could be made to fly ; and having got it there, is only too glad to let Nature reassert herself, and help him by carrying it away in her own manner, and like Wordsworth's stream, 'at its own sweet will.'

Even in this, however, he is often beaten, prostrated, rendered helpless ; but only uses the experience to make himself progressively ever stronger, and still more strong, till he sees a dry bottom, and has ample means to keep it so.

Nature *must* now retreat before her assailant ; it is, however, only to lie in wait for him in the deeper recesses of the mine ; to make his every act of locomotion, of labour, even of breathing, a source of deadly danger, a cause of constant unrest.

How many of us sitting at ease in our light and pleasant chambers, so carefully ventilated that not even the slightest taint may be feared of sufficient potency to shorten the natural term of life

even by the most infinitesimal amount, would have the individual courage, the fortitude to continue such a contest, no matter how brilliant the temptations, seeing that it is not for a day, for a special effort or occasion, bringing with it its own sufficing motive and reward, but for the whole life through, of the actual working collier?

Ah, yes! the world has yet to know, to feel with, and to act justly by this humble, patient, undemonstrative, but truly heroic example of manhood. A model in some respects surely for the whole of his kind. Watch him as he goes daily to his labour, asking no inconvenient questions, parading none of his unhappinesses through the press unto the world, fainting before no obstacles, losing heart at the contemplation of no perils. He simply says, or, better still, feels it without saying, 'This is the work I have got to do, and which, please God, I mean to do;' and this work he goes to do.

Not certainly rejoicingly, rather perhaps sadly, but he goes.

And still the strife proceeds, to even more tragical issues, but varied by incidents that lend

a certain piquant, almost a humorous, interest to it.

Meeting artifice by artifice, Nature one day plays the miner an odd trick. His pick strikes into something that is clearly not coal, and the unwelcome discovery is made that the treasure-house is suddenly empty.

Incredulous miner! He is not thus to be cheated out of his lawful prey. He guesses what has happened—‘a fault’—geologically speaking, but which he no doubt might like to express by a stronger term. He guesses rightly. As if expressly to circumvent him whose whole life is spent in circumventing her, Nature has here broken the seam asunder; and cunningly dropped the yet untouched end some distance below the other, and covered it with intervening rocks as useless as they are baffling to the miner.

Well, the boring-rod is again set to work; the lost treasure re-discovered that had been so cunningly hidden, and down go sloping roadways into it. Man is again victorious.

But at what a cost! Some day or other—however distant, it will surely come, at least so fears

every thoughtful miner—an unlucky accident to a lamp, or a vengeful swinging of it in a moment of passionate anger against the head of a comrade, or a criminal yet scarcely thought of negligence or disobedience in exposing the naked flame to kindle a pipe of tobacco, causes an explosion. Nature during one moment of terrible vengeance seems to make herself visible in all-destroying flame, but those who see her—die. In the space of a breath—a spasm, without even time for a single cry or prayer, the whole of the busy workers in that black hive may be plunged into eternity, leaving not even one solitary survivor to narrate how the ghastly tragedy happened.

Then new efforts:—perhaps a new shaft made, interminable inquests, legislative inquiries, sudden spasmodic efforts to improve—then the old relapse into inaction once more:—and so the conflict goes on.

And will continue to do so, till the hour of truer knowledge, of more Christian-like faith in the ultimate good attainable through brotherly sympathy and help, shall reconcile the combatants.

But when that blessed hour comes, man will

find how true and noble has been the friend he has so long struggled with as his worst enemy—how she has disciplined and elevated him—and how necessary and vital it is to him to sit at her feet in reverence, and learn from her what he so much needs to know.

CHAPTER I.

SPRING-TIME AND STORM.

THOUGH on the fifteenth of March school was still over at the early winter hour, it was not till past five in the afternoon that David Mort came into the little path that led through Brynnant Wood up to the village. An unusually companionable fit had made him loiter with some of his schoolfellows, who were bird-nesting in the copse below.

He had not assisted them ; but, sitting astride on the topmost stone of the stile, had watched their proceedings with a low, reflective whistle ; occasionally offering lazily a word of advice, which he bore to have scoffed or laughed at with unruffled good-temper.

He was going through the wood alone now ; making every little movement in the brambles

below, or in the boughs above, an excuse for loitering or standing still ; enjoying the warm sun on his closed eyes ; and swinging his satchel in a circle that kept an unseen nest of fledglings open-mouthed with affright, so long as he remained in their view.

It was his twelfth birthday. For six years he had passed through this wood four times almost every day, yet it had attractions for him this afternoon such as it never had before. The truth was that never before had David been strong enough to feel himself a part of the bright strong life of the wood as he did now.

It had been on account of his physical weakness that his father Israel Mort, Overman at the Cwm Aber Colliery, had, on finding him unfit for pit work, apparently lost all recollection of his very existence ; scarcely seeming to see him when he crossed his path or when he sat opposite to him at meal-times. Thus David had out-stayed nearly all schoolfellows of his own age, had learnt almost as much as his master was able to teach him, and had arrived at his twelfth year and at a sound state of health with so little notice on the part of

Israel, that David and his mother began to flatter themselves this pleasant state of things might last another five or six years.

David had dreams of slipping one day into the schoolmaster's place ; and he cherished a wild hope that nothing might occur to bring the recollection of his useless existence to his father's absorbed mind till some such end should have been obtained.

On one after another of his schoolfellows—boys who had learned perhaps from the same book as himself—the dread fiat had come. Almost every week David's eye marked some ruddy face grow prematurely old, and thoughtful, reckless, and defiant—or pale, and full of vague, unearthly fears. Then the face would be missing from the familiar row against the white school-room wall—and met no more—except hurrying with the black swarm that passed between the mine and Brynnant—all haste—blackness—whites of eyes, and white teeth.

When David prayed 'deliver us from evil,' he thought of the mine only. When he heard of heaven being above the stars, nothing seemed

to him so natural and certain as that the mine—with all its horrors, destructive fires, and treacherous waters—should be the very mouth of the world of darkness, confusion, and misery beneath.

When one of his companions passed into it, he had his quiet way of mourning for him as if he had been removed from the world by death. He haunted such spots as the young miner had liked best—made gifts to his little brother or sister, remembered him at church and on his knees at night, often woke disturbed by the imaginary sound throbbing through his soft pillow of the ‘chip-chip’ of the pickaxe wielded by the black hand of his playmate in some grim hole too small for any bulkier form than his own to work in.

A keen sense of gratitude for the safety and peaceful sunshine of his own life in the midst of such changes and dangers had had its effect on David’s character; for it seemed to him that no amount of patience, conscientious industry of mind, self-sacrifice in little things, and profound humility of soul, could ever repay God or men for

the peace vouchsafed to him in permitting him to remain upon the open sunny face of the earth, instead of forcing him down into its dark and terrible mysteries.

He began to feel that he led a charmed life, the spell of which a breath might break.

His enjoyment of it was usually quiet ; almost hidden, as a thing to which he doubted his own right ; but in the wood that afternoon everything seemed to help to deepen and strengthen it.

The sky which—each time the white clouds rolled over it—was left clearer and fresher of hue, like a beautiful eye after resting under its white lid—the sky itself seemed tempting David to hope anything, everything.

As this was the time his father would be home, David on any other day would have waited till he saw the little parlour window obscured by steam, so that he might slip in unnoticed, while the Overman, stripped to the waist, was bending—blind with hot water and soap—over a smoking tub, and while David's mother applied the scrubbing-brush or the flannels to his shoulders.

To-day, however, with an utter freedom from

his usual timidity, David strode in, and looked hungrily at the tea-table.

The Overman was taking a rest after his own peculiar fashion, standing with his hands clasped at the back of his neck, and his figure drawn up and thrown a little forward on the toes.

As David on entering had thrown the door wide open, the room was flooded with the light of the March sun, that was just then sinking behind the almost perpendicular wall of fir-trees, shaking their ethereal new-born tassels down the hill-side, across the valley, and making all around look dark or dull by their vividness.

David went at once to examine the tea-table without having noticed his father. Pleased with what he saw there, he looked up with a bright, appreciative smile at his mother, who was touching the cups on the tray. With a most unusual obliviousness she turned, and began to seek for something on a high shelf with one hand, while she held the other against her side.

A sad, patient, stricken-looking creature she was. Calamity did not so much seem to have smitten her by heavy but occasional blows, as to

have kept on her one continual cruel unrelaxing pressure, squeezing her very heart's blood out of her, and leaving reaction impossible.

You could see as she looked on her husband's and son's faces, and as she moved away to put the tea before them, that there was no spring or vital impulse of any kind left in her. She could not even complain. She could only bear in a kind of dull way her life of suffering.

Still a sharp observer might have noticed a difference in the looks she gave to Israel and to the boy. To the one it was a glance of perfectly drilled obedience—that ever waited but to know what was desired from it—without the faintest suggestion of hope or desire that she might give him or herself pleasure from the fulfilment of his wishes. To the other it was at once a glance of tender love and earnest fear, but both shadowed and weakened by the sense of utter helplessness.

Noticing her peculiar behaviour, and seeing that his father was making no preparations for his bath, and must therefore be going back to the pit with the night-shift of miners, David began to think

something had happened there—an accident, a death, perhaps.

The blood rushed to his cheeks, which still tingled from the cutting March wind; and he turned to his father in silent, humble inquiry.

Israel Mort stood just in the stream of light the open door admitted. He was still clasping his hands behind his neck and standing raised on his toes, as if the luxury of stretching was the most complete rest he could have. The whole of him, from the top of a sort of skull-cap to his boots, was black, with the exception of his eyes with their pupils of dull brown and large yellowish whites; with the exception, also, of a slight redness at his finger-nails, and the redness of half his lips where his breath had moistened them. These were well formed, as indeed were all his features; but there was on them a repose almost startling. It was not the repose of a face denoting inward peace, it was the repose of stone. It was a face that reminded one of the front of a house that, from some whim of its inmates, has ceased to be used as a front. If Israel's thoughts might be

called the inmates of his face, *they* certainly seldom indeed (if ever) appeared there. They led a hidden life. Their results might be known in the outer world sometimes, but they themselves were invisible; none saw their coming or their going. The very dulness of his opaque brown eyes was the dulness of eyes that *chose* to be dull; to wear a blind of impassiveness, almost stupor, through which their owner might, unsuspected, study any face he liked as closely as he liked.

The Overman's figure was, perhaps, even more remarkable than his face. It was rather above the middle height; and though scant of flesh, had no visible angle anywhere about it, but a kind of hard roundness from head to foot. Perhaps his clothes, made to suit his own notions of utility and comfort, helped to this effect. Certainly Israel Mort had less the appearance of a man of flesh, bone, and blood than he had of an iron worm; round, lithe, and living; and made to work, and eat, and writhe its way through the stony and carboniferous fastnesses of the earth. He looked, in fact, a diver-born, ready armed and

breathed, to dive again and yet again into that underground, waveless sea of death.

As David looked at his father, questioning with his wide, timorous blue eyes, Israel let the clasp of his hands at the back of his neck snap ; and stretching one towards David, laid it on his head and looked at him steadily with those dull, impassive orbs of his.

David's breath quickened, so did the beating of his heart. His mother looked on.

It was several years since the Overman had taken so much notice of his useless son.

‘Why, we shall be getting *too* strong, next,’ said he, in the loud deep tone of one accustomed to hear his voice muffled and dulled by narrow walls and low roof.

‘He is flushed,’ said Mrs. Mort. ‘Come to your tea, David.’

‘Flushed!’ echoed Israel, drawing his hand over both cheeks. ‘Cool as a cucumber!’ he added, with a slight smile, as he turned from the boy, and went to wash his face and hands.

He had no sooner left the room than David's eyes sought his mother's. He found them fixed

upon him sorrowfully, passionately ; but no sooner did they encounter his than they turned away again.

David crossed to where his mother stood busying herself with some things on the top of an old bureau. He touched her elbow.

‘ Mother ! ’

Mrs. Mort looked round, not at David, but over him towards the door by which Israel had gone out and would presently return.

There was a great resemblance between these two, though David was a picture of health and grace without blemish, and Mrs. Mort was wan and angular. David, too, though blue-eyed, was much darker than his mother, whose fairness had now blanched into a dull, faint colour, which possessed eyes, lips, cheeks, and hair. The thing which made them so alike was the long-endured, never-absent dread, the unmentioned haunting fear that both shared.

‘ Mother ! ’ said David again, in a more rousing and comforting voice.

‘ Go to your tea, David,’ Mrs. Mort said sharply, pushing him by the shoulder ; and glancing up,

David saw his father coming into the room, and looking straight at them with perfectly expressionless eyes.

While they were at tea, David and his mother experienced a moment or two of the greatest relief and peace they had ever known. Israel began to talk of his employer, Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, and his illness, of the quarrels about his case between the Brynnant medical man and the doctor who attends the people of the mine. While he was speaking David asked himself if he might not be as wrong and unreasonable in his suspicions this time as he had been so many, many times before. But he remembered his mother's anxious, timorous manner. What had she heard to have looked as she did when he came in?

Then he wondered might it not be that after all she had taken her fears from his own face when his father had so startled him? He looked at her, trying to express his feeling that their dread had been groundless. The wan face lightens suddenly.

David was assured. It *was* after all, he felt again, only his own cowardly fancy. His mother

would have feared nothing if it had not been for *his* fear.

He had come home with rather a better appetite than even school, bird-nesting, and the March wind might be supposed to impart. This had vanished completely at Israel's unusual attentions, but now it returned again in full strength. There is no telling how long he might have gone on hacking at the quartern loaf with his vigorous little clasp-knife, disregarding utterly his mother's looks of hesitating remonstrance, if he had not suddenly become aware of his father's eyes being fixed upon him.

Israel nodded.

'Eat away,' said he: 'to work like a man, one *must* eat like a man.'

The little clasp-knife fell; the great slice it had just cut lay across David's plate untouched.

He looked again at his mother, but her colourless eyelashes were down as if glued to her pale cheek.

Israel turned to her and said carelessly—

'Mary, just bring that bundle I brought in it's on David's bed.'

She rose and left the room. While she was gone, David sat without raising his eyes, and fully conscious that his father was watching him.

When Mrs. Mort returned, David rose at the sight of her. She had nothing in her hands, but her lips were almost blue, and she seemed scarcely able to drag one foot after the other as she went to Israel's chair.

She laid both her hands upon his shoulder, and, bending down, whispered something that David did not hear. His father, however, noticed her words in no other way than turning to look at her, and saying in his Overman's voice—

‘I asked you to bring them here, Mary.’

She went again and came back with something in her arms. David saw directly what this was—a suit of mining clothes made of a size to fit *him*.

She went up to Israel with them, but instead of letting him take them when he stretched out his hand, she held them so tightly as she looked at him, that he was obliged to rise and drag them gently but firmly from her.

‘Now David, my man,’ said he, throwing them at the boy's feet, ‘put those on.’

‘Father!’ cried David. ‘Mother! what are they for? Oh! you don’t mean, father—’

‘Put them on!’ commanded the Overman, in a certain peculiar tone of his that was very rarely disobeyed. ‘Obedience first, David; questions afterwards.’

In two or three minutes Israel was contemplating, with grim satisfaction, what seemed to him a small but promising imitation of himself.

One thing annoyed his eye as he surveyed him :—

‘Mary,’ he said, turning to his wife, ‘give me a pair of scissors: we must have nothing straggling and ready to catch at things; this hair might be in the way.’

By this time, however, Mrs. Mort was perfectly useless. She had fallen into a chair, and sat watching them like one spell-bound.

David felt that, unfit as he was to speak, the moment for his appeal had come. He would make one desperate attempt to touch his father’s heart; he would tell him all his hopes, his little

plans of how he might be a man by other means than this.

When Israel took the scissors from the bureau and began to cut his hair, the boy considered that perhaps it would be as well to wait till he had finished, lest it should seem this trivial act had anything to do with his emotion and resistance.

All at once, while he was wondering how nearly his father had finished his novel task, David had a leather cap drawn firmly down over his head, and felt himself approaching the door in a grasp of iron.

Two simultaneous cries, expressing all the fears that had tortured two hearts for years, were heard from end to end of the rows of miners' cottages known as Pekin.

Some of the neighbours running out from their doors to learn what that shriek of 'Israel!' and 'Father!' meant, saw the Overman's figure, with a smaller one beside it, passing swiftly in the twilight.

Two women whispered together—and hurried to the Overman's cottage.

Opening the door and looking in, they saw by

the firelight a woman sitting on the floor, looking wildly at a little heap of light hair beside her.

Seeing them, she lifted her eyes and arms, crying out—

‘ Yes, it has come at last ! Oh ! God, have mercy —have mercy upon him ! ’

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING HOW AN ANGEL APPEARED TO DAVID.

THE way to the mine was, for a short time, through a wood, which was in parts so dense as to create an artificial darkness.

Somehow David felt that this darkness was necessary for the fearful occasion, and that such a horror as putting a young shrinking soul and body into the dark mysteries of the earth could scarcely have been committed in broad open daylight and sunshine.

He wondered feebly whether he might perchance be saved if, when they got free from the wood, the sun burst out again and shone upon his father's face, so as to shame the hard and cruel resolution from his eyes, and slacken the iron grip of his hand.

He looked up askance at him, and tried to

shape some faltering words that he would say to him; but the hard features seemed to grow to iron, and even to assume something of the tinge of iron in the subdued light.

Israel noticed the effort, and said in a less harsh voice than usual—

‘All right, boy, we’re fairly off now. It’ll soon be over, and you’ll laugh at your own fears when you get back home. I dare say I was a bit uncomfortable when I first went down, though I can’t say as I remember the fact.’

From time to time black figures, each one holding a lamp, or having it hung on the breast, met them; others were passed by them; the former leaving the mine from their day’s labour, the latter going to it, to begin the business of the night.

They all looked questioningly from Israel to David, and back again to Israel; while the boy yearningly, passionately gazed into their faces, seeking perhaps some familiar friend, and asking, in that dumb but moving eloquence—was there no one in all the world who could and would save him?

He dared not speak. The colliers, on their

part, knowing the temper of the Overman, and conscious of his power, moved on, also in silence.

The pair emerged from the wood, and there, immediately before and a little below them, was the exterior of the mine of Cwm Aber.

David thought he knew the whole ugly picture by heart, down to the smallest detail. It was a fearful mistake he felt now. He had looked at it before merely as a scene that being constantly near or before him became necessarily familiar, but about which he cared nothing, felt no curiosity ; and upon which his eyes never rested any longer than they could help, though drawing from it new zest for the enjoyment of his walks over the fern-clad mountains, or through the lovely neighbouring valleys and woods when wild flowers were abundant.

But now he sickened at the sight of the awful-looking place, and the dusky forms moving to and fro, and crowding about the pit mouth.

All that poor David had ever heard and read of heaven or hell, of angels or demons, came vividly into his mind, as he thought of the beautiful world and the playmates he was leaving

behind him, and of the hideous depths into which he was about to descend, guided by these ghastly spectre shapes.

He heard, as in a dream, the measured slow beat of the engine, then its sudden quickening, its violent pantings and rush, then its relapse into slowness and momentary silent lull.

He saw, without being able even to wish to understand them, the beautiful airy wheels revolve on high.

For he saw also the black cage ascend and descend with its human freight, and the thought that *that* would presently be waiting for him seemed almost to deprive the lad of his senses.

Israel still strode on, pitilessly as Fate, with David as the victim in his grasp.

The place of terror—the actual pit's mouth was reached.

The colliers moved aside, in deference to the Overman, and left the way clear.

A moment more, and father and son stood close beside the cage, Israel almost touching it, David striving with all his little strength to keep as far from it as he could.

Then, seeing the sternness of his father's face, and the look of indignant surprise and wonder that accompanied the severe expression, David rallied what little courage remained to him, and said in a trembling excited voice—

‘Please, father, let me go by myself.’

Israel scanned his face just for a single moment, then said—

‘Certainly!’ and waited for David to speak or move.

The boy looked round desperately in every direction, but did not attempt to fly, conscious it would be useless.

Then he looked once more at the cage, and shrank.

‘What now?’ asked Israel, threateningly. Then, after a pause, he said with more gentleness, ‘Come, I shall get in first.’

Israel got in, and called to David to follow.

The boy did not answer, but stood panting, with dilated nostrils and heaving shoulders.

Israel got out again without uttering a word, and went to take hold of him, but David fell on his knees, and, throwing back his brow, on which

large drops of sweat had risen, began to shriek at him.

Again Israel spoke to his son, asking him if he would go quietly down.

Getting no answer, he suddenly lifted David as he knelt, and thrust him in the cage.

Here David clung to his neck so fiercely that he was about to strike him with his clenched fist to make him let go.

At that moment the unknown, unseen angel, to whom poor David had been praying passionately, even though half unconsciously, to come down from heaven and save him—since from earth and man there was no hope—suddenly interposed, and stood between them.

Certainly a more unangelic-looking messenger from the skies it would be hard to conceive. For while, like all the other colliers around, who were busy having their lamps locked, or reclining on coal heaps near the fire that burnt on an iron tripod, everything about him looked preternaturally black or preternaturally white, this man was distinguished by his startling ugliness—due to no natural defect, but simply to the burns he

had experienced in an explosion. These had left the surface of the cheek fearfully scarred and bossed, and had altogether erased one eyebrow—leaving in its place a ghastly line of white skin that seemed rather silk than human cuticle.

But David saw nothing of this; he saw only the bright and kindly eye, and the sympathetic expression of the features. He experienced an instant and immense revulsion of feeling—from utter despair to brightest hope. His guardian angel was there! And in the person of the man next in authority under Israel—James Lusty, his deputy.

‘What, Master David,’ said the cheery voice, ‘going to get a bit o’ experience o’ mining, and larn to be as clever as your father? Ah, lad! that ain’t so easy! But wait a bit, and we’ll see what can be done—won’t we, Master Mort?’

Then turning to Israel, he added—

‘Let the lad alone for to-night, and let him go down with me o’ Monday morning. I know the ways of boys—I ought to, having had eight of my own, and ahl on ’em down in mines in one part o’ the country or another.’

‘I think, Lusty, you had better mind your own affairs, and leave me to mind mine. There’s the slip in level No. 5 must be seen to to-night; the roof’s giving. Now David!’

‘Stop, Mr. Mort! Looking at you and the lad I quite forgot what I came back to the mine for. I have just seen the governor; he sent for you, and then, when they said you were away, he sent for me.’

‘What for?’ demanded Israel harshly, who had his own particular reasons for letting everybody about him understand there was to be no currying favour with Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, the owner.

‘I wondered what for myself, but I had orders, and of course I obeyed.’

‘Well?’ said Israel, impatiently.

‘I found him very ill,’ continued Lusty, ‘and in an awful temper, swearing more oaths than I ever know’d the existence of afore, and between whiles axing, “Where is Israel? Why doesn’t he come? What business has the fellow to be away?”’

‘And what did you answer?’

“ Well, sir,” says I, “ no doubt cuttin’ coal, and seein’ it done is the first dooty o’ life, but you see it ain’t easy to do this duty without a bit of eating and a bit of washin’ and a bit of sleepin’ now and then ; and it seems to me, sir, if I may make bold to speak, that Israel Mort don’t get very much of any of these little wants of natur’.”

‘ You said that Jem ? ’

‘ Ask him if I didn’t ! ’

‘ And then ? ’

‘ Well, he looked as I once seed a tiger look in a showman’s cage, when, having got hold of a delicate morsel in a child’s finger, pushed between the bars, he was obligated to let go by a red-hot bar of iron a-fizzing unpleasantly at his hind quarters. And then he says to me, “ It seems to me, Jem, that ahl you fellows care more for my Overman, and what he says and does, than for me.” That made me grin, as I said back to him, “ If we do, it ain’t for want of his well workin’ us, I can tell you, sir ; no, nor for want of his makin’ us ahl do the work cheap.” Then he laughed, and owned there was summat i’ that, and then,

after rapping out another oath, too bad even for me, who ain't partiklar, to repeat, he hustled me off to seek you, and send you to him, and his last speech to me was, "Tell Mort," says he, "these damned doctors think I am dying, but ain't men enough to say so; and that if I do die before he gets here, it'll be ahl the worse for him."'

Israel lost no time in indecision. Just for a single moment he paused, in study, then gave Lusty his orders :

'Go to Rees Thomas, level No. 5. Tell him to take as many repairers as he wants and begin at the far end, choosing for the present only the most dangerous bits. You do the same from this end. So go on till the colliers come to work in the morning, if you don't see me before. Should anything particular occur that needs to be acted on, act at once. Consult together, use your best judgment, agree if you can, but agree quickly; and if you can't agree, let Rees Thomas as night-deputy decide.'

'Ticklish job, Mr. Mort! Them props and cross beams are desperate bad!'

‘I know that. But you’re the very men to be trusted with such jobs. Explain to Rees Thomas why I can’t come as I promised him. He has been worrying me about the “danger,” as he calls it.’

Lusty went away to get his men, tools, &c., and his going seemed to David like a second and more tragic withdrawal of the light and blessedness of the sun.

He waited; every limb trembling with apprehension lest the struggle was about to be renewed.

He saw his father glance askance at him, while he stood pondering over some idea about which he hesitated.

‘David,’ he said, turning to the boy, and speaking in more thoughtful, measured tones than were usual with him in addressing dependants, ‘David, are you man enough to keep a promise if you make one?’

‘What—what—promise, father?’ faltered out David, anxious to please, yet afraid of the consequences.

‘Well, I can’t go down the mine with you to-

night, and I suppose you'd rather go with me when you do go?'

'Y—, yes—father!'

'On Monday morning I expect to have quite other business to attend to, if, as seems likely, Mr. Jehoshaphat dies before then. Are you listening? Do you understand?'

'Yes, father!'

'Now then I'll see if I can treat you as a man. I'll make a bargain with you, if only to see how you can keep it. Give me your word you will go down with me quietly on Monday morning early, just for an hour or two, to see the place and the people at work, and get used to them, and then you shall come up again with me, and go with me to the Farm—if I go—but in any case you shall have the rest of the day for a holiday. Then on Tuesday morning you begin in earnest, with no more nonsense! Now, David, that'll please your mother.'

'Oh no, father!' burst in David, impetuously.

'Well then, it'll please me. Are you man enough to do this—to know the time has come when you must act like a man? Will you

take my hand now, and say bravely, "Yes, father"?''

David's heart was full, and Israel had at last found the way to it. After a few natural spasms of anguish at the renewed thought of the beautiful world behind him and the hideous mine below, he took his father's large outstretched hand between both his little ones, tried to smile, then burst into tears and stifled sobs, while saying,

'Yes, father, yes, I will! Oh, I will indeed!'

'You promise me to go quietly down on Monday morning for an hour or two.'

'I do, father!'

'You promise me to begin work regularly on Tuesday, and to let me be troubled with no more nonsense?'

'Yes, father,' cried David, still holding the hand and pressing it convulsively against his panting breast.

'All right. Fulfil your promise and you shall be a man—perhaps after all a deal luckier man than your father, when you come to see all that I see. Now then go home, and tell your mother that I may be very late—perhaps kept all night.'

David's first impulse was to run, his next to go very slowly indeed, lest his father might, because he saw him run, stop him.

There was only a few yards to pass over before he would get behind a building, and then——

His father was still standing where he had left him. He was sure of that, for he had listened with intensest expectancy for the sound of his step, which he felt he must be able to distinguish. Why did his father not move? He must be hesitating! And David knew instinctively that this letting him escape was not an action natural to his father.

With bounding heart and step he was just about to pass behind the house which contained the gigantic revolving fan for ventilating the mine, when, like the voice of doom, came the one word,

‘David!’

Should he turn or fly? This might be his last chance! No: his father had appealed to him—as a man—he still remembered that; he would turn and go back.

He did so, and Israel met him, and looked and

spoke as pleased in his grim fashion at the boy's obedience. David saw his face, and noted the tone of voice, and felt certain his father had done this only to try him, and he was glad—almost proud.

‘As I told thee, lad,’ said Israel, ‘I may be very late. So thou hadst better hear now what I was about to tell thee in the morning. Mr. Jehoshaphat is to be prayed for at the church to-morrow. I shall be there if I can. Tell your mother you are to be there too—even if she won't go.’

‘But, father—mother is so miserable if I don't go to chapel with her.’

‘Be at the church early, a few minutes before the service begins. You will larn to-morrow, I expect, more than your silly school has yet larned you in all these years. You will larn all about a great man—and so larn, I hope, how to be a great man yourself. Succeed—succeed—succeed—my boy! That's the one thing I and the parson are now going to try to teach you. Now run home—fast as you like.’

David needed no second bidding. Away he

went, with steps almost as fleet as those of the hare, that, after escaping her hunters, suddenly frightens herself with the fear they may again be upon her, and therefore, though unpursued, again takes madly to flight.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH THE REVEREND HORACE JONES
DISCOVERS HE IS AN ORATOR.

THE little church of Brynnant, in South Wales, stands at the very mouth of a winding valley, that is seen high up, emerging from behind and between two mountain-crests, then rapidly descending, accompanied by the music of its own wild stream, till it debouches through the churchyard, as if that were its own particular gateway, on to the broad marshy plain, which here skirts the seashore, protected by a line of sandbanks far as the eye can reach.

The scene is one of no ordinary beauty. The little river—rushing along in a kind of sweet tumult of rejoicing—encircles nearly two-thirds of the churchyard wall; as though the living spirit

of the water, coming fresh, pure, impulsive from a thousand natural springs, and about to offer itself for the use of the people of the village, desired before its contact with humanity to obtain the virtue and assurance of consecration.

To watch from inside the low churchyard wall the circuitous descent of this water over its rocky bed is a constant charm : so many little incidents disturb its course ; so many voices seem born with the incidents and die with them ; so many lights and shadows make it a continual playground. And then, as it approaches a weir, there is such a sudden swirl and rush, as if it were about to leap over rather than glide down across the step-like ledges of the tiny barrier.

Yet, if you lift your eyes but for a moment from the minute details that enthrall you, how great is the contrast ! Noble mountains are on either side, whose majestic bulk and contour dwarf everything about them, and seem to reduce all but themselves to utter insignificance. Even the broad sea, in this its hour of peaceful repose, seems but as a grander moat to these sublime natural fortresses.

It is Sunday afternoon, and people are slowly gathering towards the church, stopping as they meet, in groups, to discuss the all-important event of last night, the dangerous illness of Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams, the oldest living communicant, the founder of their schools, the employer of the bulk of their labouring poor.

And is he really given over by the doctor? Will the curate pray for him? Will he speak of him in his sermon? Does old Mrs. Jehoshaphat, his wife, know? Will she be at church presently?

So runs the ceaseless flow of questions which no one attempts to answer, but which is instantly arrested as an aged and infirm woman enters the churchyard, her right hand grasping a strong stick, her left resting on the arm of a rustic-looking youth, whose vacant face and limp whitish diseased-looking hair, from which all traces of vitality seem discharged, imply degradation of race, and offer a significant commentary on the bold peasantry, their country's pride, of which the poet speaks.

He moves mechanically, just as she impels him,

seeming, indeed, to have no business whatever in creation but to hold that trembling arm—do as it bids him, by the language of hasty jerks or pulls—and move on, with lips apart, and eyes that would be full of wonder at what is now passing, but that their natural power does not extend quite so far.

As man and wife have long been divided, in homes as well as hearts, the whole parish knows of the sad state of the relations between this aged, tottering, but still defiant-looking woman, and the unhappy man, now stricken so low in his solitary dwelling on a spur of the mountain-height. But if their relations had been ever so secret, it would, if we may judge from her present behaviour, have mattered little to Mrs. Jehoshaphat, who is stopping to speak to one of the men as he is going towards the church porch.

‘What, Israel Mort come to church once more!’

‘So it seems,’ responded Israel, confronting her with a calmness that made the old lady irritable.

‘And when were you here last? Shall I tell you?’

‘As you please, Mrs. Jehoshaphat.’

‘Never since you came with him, my husband, when he was what you still are, an Overman on six-and-twenty shillings a week.’

‘It’s very likely,’ said the imperturbable Israel, who seemed rather interested than offended by her attack.

‘Very likely!’ repeated the shrill and angry voice of the old lady; which then sank low, almost to a whisper before she went on. ‘Hark you, Israel Mort—was it also very likely that you who was then his only friend, should try to trip him up, and get his place?’

‘He thought it uncommon likely,’ said Israel, with a grim something passing over his features, that looked like a shadow, but might be his sardonic smile. ‘I know, ma’am, he laughed confoundedly when he found it out, and owned he should ha’ done just the same.’

‘Ay, and he made you his slave ever since, by way of punishment. While he has laughed still more at that, many and many a time in my hearing.’

‘Don’t they say a willin’ slave is the worst of slaves?’ asked Israel; but finding she gave no

answer, answered himself. 'I say he is, and that's what I have been. And now, ma'am, havin' had all your own way—as ladies like to have—I hope you're pleased with me, and I wish you good mornin'!'

Mrs. Jehoshaphat had begun her attack on Israel in a tone of bitter scorn, but it was obvious to him she was moved by quite different emotions than those she allowed to appear. She had continued to the last word to speak as if her thought and her speech were as effectually divorced as herself and husband; but seemed suddenly to lose her self-control, and be seized with a fit of passionate emotion which well-nigh choked her. She shook as if with palsy. Her almost toothless gums went up and down mechanically, as if she vainly strove to continue her speech. After a brief pause, during which the man she had addressed stood silent, gazing at her as if he perfectly understood all she had said or would say, but saw no sufficient reason to interfere, she recovered herself as Israel was moving to go away, stretched out her stick, and touched him with it gently.

He turned, and saw an expression in her face that caused him to retrace his steps.

‘Israel, don’t mind me. I can’t help speaking out a bit now and then. I should go mad if I didn’t. Tell me, how is he?’

‘Mr. Jehoshaphat was very ill indeed when I left him this forenoon.’

‘Not—not dying?’

‘It’s hard to say, ma’am.’

‘You know I went to him on Wednesday last, and conjured him to let there be peace betwixt us, and to allow me to tend him, and try to comfort him?’

‘Yes, I heard of your visit, ma’am.’

‘And do you know the message he sent out to me?’

‘No, ma’am.’

‘He said if he did receive me, and he got better, he knew he should only send me away as before; while, if he was going to die, no help of mine could avail him.’

‘I won’t defend his hardness, ma’am—no; but one can’t help saying it’s something to see a

man with a will in this world o' chattering puppets.'

'Shall I go again to him?'

'If you like, but I can't say I think it'll do the least good.'

'Is his heart so hardened against me even now—in what may be his last hours?'

'He's a strange man. He's been a puzzle to me all my life, although I begin to see my way to the bottom of it. If you let him alone you will find he will act better than you expect.'

'You know something, Israel! I see it in your face!'

'There, ma'am, I must contradict. My face hasn't the habit of betraying its master.'

'But answer me—do you not know something that might lighten my burden? It is not the money I want, even though I like money. No, if he leaves me only the bare pittance he has given me since we separated, but with it a few kindly words or tokens,—'

'Tokens, ma'am, not words, by all means,' interposed Israel.

'Has he done anything of this kind?'

‘If I knew, I should not tell you, ma’am.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it’s sartin he keeps his own secrets, and would expect me to do the same.’

‘Israel Mort—man—remember! He may be dying now, while I may live many years.’

‘Yes, ma’am, and what then?’

‘Why then, fool that you are! can’t you see that I may befriend you, or——’

‘The reverse, ma’am! It’s quite true. But if the time should come that you want me, I put it to yourself whether you’d prefer to know I’d been false to one employer when goin’ to join another. Mrs. Jehoshaphat, I believe I know you as well as most folk, and my opinion is, that though you’re angry now, you’ll be pleased hereafter.’

‘Not with you!’

‘With me, ma’am,’ responded Israel, ‘with me.’

She looked at him sternly, fixedly, trying to penetrate through the hard surface to whatever might lie beneath, but made no further attempt to speak.

He answered her look with one that still further assured her he did know something—not

unfavourable to her—of her interests, and the sternness insensibly passed from her features.

She moved on, passed through the porch, and her face had regained all its customary placid rigidity by the time she sat down panting in the corner of her comfortable high-backed pew.

Israel Mort looked after her with a kind of admiration, as if the thought of confronting hardness with hardness seemed to him like a key-note to his own nature.

The bell was still going, and he knew therefore the service had not yet begun.

He stood musing for a little space, but appeared the while to be simply reading a verse of poetry, newly inscribed, without name or date, on a stone also new, at the head of a little grass-covered grave.

With some effort to abstract his thoughts from the things that pre-occupied them before going into church, he read the verse mechanically, without, however, taking in its meaning—

Weep not for we, our parents dear,
Nor be for ever sad ;
The shorter time we livèd here
The fewer sins we had.

Something in his recollection of the last two lines, after he had turned to go away, caused him to turn back, and see to what children the verse referred.

If anything could startle Israel into emotion, or move that somewhat immovable heart of his, he must have been moved to feel now, as he suddenly recollected that he had once seen these lines at home in his wife's feeble handwriting not long after the death of their two young children. Yes, he remembered that; and how, on the ground of expense, he forbade stone or memorial of any kind to be erected. She then obeyed him. Yet now, after the lapse of three years, this memorial must have been erected by her secretly. He knew the position of the children's grave, even though he had never seen the place since the day of burial till now—yes, it was them about whom he had been reading so carelessly.

But if he felt much, he said nothing, except to ask himself where she had got the money.

He no longer stood to listen to the talk that was still going on in low tones all about him; but, lifting his head to confront whatever face might

seem to ask him why he came again to church after so many years of absence, passed slowly in, and sat down in a corner darkened by a pillar.

The afternoon service at Brynnant is not usually a very impressive one. It is conducted in the English language, for the residents of a neighbourhood who are mostly Welsh. It is a very short service, as though experience, wiser than logic, had taught the necessity of adapting its length to the size of the congregation. And the faithful few who do attend seem to be actuated not so much by their belief in any special benefit they are themselves going to receive, as by the charitable desire to set a good example for the edification of others. This consideration may explain the wandering glances often to be detected there by a curious observer—for naturally those pious philanthropists want to see how much good they may happen to be doing. On the whole, it must be confessed that minister and congregation are alike respectable and listless.

But if no message is ever delivered there that is likely to rouse the torpid as with the blast of a

trumpet, let but some incident of the neighbourhood be touched on, and there is an instantaneous quickening of the attention : eyes become suddenly riveted on the minister ; ears listen intently ; something that is neither hush nor stir, but an odd compound of both, seems to pass electrically through the place. And then ?

Why then—perhaps—banns of marriage are read for the first time between Jenkyn Thomas of this parish, and Ruth Roberts, young members of the church, who have kept their secret so well that ‘the news comes quite unexpectedly’ on their neighbours—that is to say, the whole congregation—and will engross them throughout the sermon, as the curate unfortunately knows.

The general style of the Reverend Horace Jones, perpetual curate, is not eloquent : that must be confessed. Neither are his views nor his illustrations original. But even as he is, without intellectual robustness or vivid colour, how might he not rouse them to themes of the highest and most vital import with his unquestionable earnestness and sincerity, if he could but learn from such accidents how first of all to interest !

To-day the lesson is easy to learn. It is his patron Jehoshaphat Williams who is dying, and for whom he is about to supplicate the Divine succour and comfort. The same subject is touched upon in his sermon, which he fondly thinks of from time to time even while conducting the service. It is the unforgiven wife, Mrs. Jehoshaphat, and the neglected, perhaps also unforgiven, brother, Griffith Williams, who will listen to him ; to say nothing of the two or three colliers he perceives among the congregation as representative of the hundreds outside, whose daily bread depends upon the works Jehoshaphat Williams has so long and so successfully carried on.

The curate catches a glimpse too, after a little time, of a form he had never again expected to see in that place. Yes, it is he, Israel Mort the Overman, who stands half concealing himself behind a pillar, as if ashamed of his many years' absence.

The sight of him stirs the curate's blood.

The two men in former days have discussed religious topics, unwillingly on the part of Israel, condescendingly on the part of the curate, till he

found the collier's bluntness of logic and speech, and his resolute observance of the Christian rule to be no respecter of persons, so unpleasant, that he withdrew in a very dignified manner from the controversy ; and did not even seem to hear the parting shot Israel sent after him, of

‘ Well, parson, whenever thee likest to have another tussle I’m thy man ! ’

It is wonderful what life and vivacity a little personal resentment puts into the souls of the best of us under certain circumstances. All the neglected counsel and ministration of so many years, all the known hardness of Israel’s character—plainly due to his wanton neglect of Christian brotherhood—all the contributions, individually trifling, but noticeable through their growth in the lapse of time—that Israel should have paid there with a glad heart, remembering the curate’s constant text, ‘ For God loveth a cheerful giver ’—all these things seemed to grow in the curate’s imagination mountains high. When he also recollected that the unseemly words referred to were spoken immediately after Mort’s last visit to the church—the last visit, indeed, he had been known

to pay to any place of worship—these things roused the curate. He felt as though the hour had indeed come for another ‘tussle,’ but not of the vulgar kind speculated on by Israel Mort.

No, this day must be a great one for him, but for very different reasons. Let Israel Mort sink back for the present into his natural insignificance.

Did he draw courage from the signs of apparent fear exhibited by Israel in going behind the pillar?

If so, it does not much benefit him ; for Israel, watching his opportunity, of the general rising for the hymn, emerges from his place of shelter, and takes a seat near to, and straight in front of, the reading-desk.

No wonder the curate’s cheek mantles at the hardened sinner’s audacity. But he is master of the position, and rather exults in the idea of making this man, even he, a witness of his ‘coming triumph.’

He is too much engrossed by his own fancies to perceive the true cause of Israel’s change of place. The Overman wanted, while seeming decorously to look towards the minister, to watch the pew

where sat one who would, in all probability, become the future owner of the mine, Mr. Griffith Williams, with his family; who were, apart from Mrs. Jehoshaphat, the only known relatives of the dying man.

How it is no one exactly knows, but whatever the curate says or does, seems to undergo to-day a kind of subdued unctuous change. His voice, manner, gestures, the very look of his face, grow in fervour and in authority; and a corresponding glow and acceptance kindles sympathetically in the hearts of those who listen.

Jehoshaphat Williams has been by no means a model man in any of the relations of life; but, on the contrary, notable through the neighbourhood as an unkind husband, a negligent brother, a hard master, and a reckless speculator with the lives of the people in his general system of management.

But who can remember these things now? Or, if they must be remembered, who can help seeing them in new and more kindly lights, when they recall Jehoshaphat's benefactions to the church, school and village; when they see his relatives come here to-day, full, no doubt, of pity

and forgiveness ; and when, above all, they picture him as dying in his dreadful solitude, turning now his wistful gaze upwards towards heaven, and now towards them, and to their minister, his constant friend, asking all to pray for him in that holy place where he may never again be able to rejoin them ?

The congregation is therefore in an admirable state of mind to respond to the fervent supplications of the curate for the recovery of their common benefactor, and, at the close low ejaculations burst from many lips of ‘ Amen ! ’ ‘ Amen ! ’

Scarcely had the sounds died away when the door opened, and a boy appeared on the threshold relieved against the bright March sunshine and the green and lovely tresses of a willow outside waving to and fro.

He looked flushed, and yet with a kind of boyish confidence in his face. Nor did he seem troubled by the fact of his coming in so late.

No one would have cared to notice the occurrence at another time, but now all eyes converged upon him, as if instinctively divining the news he brought.

The lad stole timidly and hesitatingly along,

looking first one side then the other, in search of some person whom he could not find, and colouring violently as he became conscious of the universal attention directed to his proceedings.

Israel was just then engrossed by thinking over a look given him by Mr. Griffith Williams, which he had again and again vainly sought till now, and which seemed almost to say, 'Let us meet after the service.'

The Overman had not, therefore, noticed the entrance of the new comer. Suddenly he became aware of the general movement of curiosity, and turned to see what all the people were looking at.

He saw his son David, and at once, in perfect calmness, beckoned to him to come to where he was.

'What is it?' asked Israel in a whisper, and bending low his head.

'He is dead, father.'

'Did you see him?'

'Yes, father.'

'Sit down.'

David obeyed, and Israel, after a moment of

intense pause and hush, rose to his feet as if actually intending to make the news public.

Fortunately for the decorum of the place, the curate was at the time retiring to the vestry, to put on his gown for the delivery of the sermon.

Israel sat down. Remembering then the cause of the curate's absence, in spite of the many years that had elapsed since he had been accustomed to these details of the service, he rose, and immediately left the church, and went round to the place where the minister was, who stared and frowned at the intrusion.

‘Reverend sir,’ began Israel, in a hushed and apologetic tone of voice; ‘I beg pardon for the interruption, but I think you ought to know that Mr. Jehoshaphat Williams is dead. My son David has seen him.’

The curate took up the word: ‘Dead! Mr. Mort? Well, God’s will be done and not man’s will. The answer to our prayers has been given and is not to be gainsaid. Accept my thanks for this timely intimation. It may be of service as regards my discourse to-day.’

‘Just what I thought, reverend sir,’ answered Israel.

‘Please to return to your place, Mr. Mort, and let the fact be known with as little disturbance as possible that death is in the house of Jehoshaphat Williams.’

Israel lost not a moment in obeying the curate’s commands, and in consequence there was quite a buzz in the church when the gowned minister re-entered.

The curate has often since then confessed to his intimates—in those confidential moments when the dearest secrets of life are allowed just to appear, be gazed on, and withdrawn perhaps for ever—that it is still a source of wonder to him how he became suddenly inspired to throw aside the greater part of his sermon, that had cost him so many painful hours of anxious labour, and trust himself with only occasional assistance from his MS. to launch out on the unknown sea of extemporaneous delivery. But he did so resolve; and surely he ought to be thankful for it, for it was to be the one success of a lifetime, a comfort

to him in all future years, when grown diffident—very diffident—as to the many other successes that were to have followed.

He ascended the pulpit. He felt at once bold, and yet full of fear ; clear in his determination of what he was about to do, but feeling himself tremble nervously, whenever he gave even the most casual glance aside, at the idea of possible consequences.

Mort's hard, almost ironical, glance met his own as he raised his head from silent prayer and prepared to begin.

Was the Overman supposing that he had given some hint as to the sermon, and waiting to see how the curate meant to carry it out ?

The fact disturbed him ; and he did not begin as he had half intended, by putting aside his written sermon. On the contrary, he placed it before him as usual, and looked at it lovingly, most lovingly, as if he saw there reflected, as in a glass, all the noble and sweet and pious images that had filled his brain during the act of composition.

Perhaps he needed that bit of help from the old routine to see him fairly going on his new adventure.

And then the sight of the manuscript suggested the value of the first paragraph, which he always learned by heart, so that he might be sure of beginning well.

But if he used it ever so little, might he not be drawn away from his purpose, and so lose this solemn, this grand opportunity?

And then, while seeming only to be clearing his throat, he tossed for a moment or two in an agony of doubt and hesitation between what he might lose of his wealth in actual possession, and his hope of newer and more precious wealth to be obtained by going boldly to seek it.

Compelled to act, yet unable to choose, he resolved to make a sudden dash at something, if only to put an end to the awful stillness that prevailed around him, and which seemed to enter into and chill his very marrow with apprehension of a break-down.

He began by murmuring in an almost inaudible voice a sentence or two. Then light broke

upon him and he began again, and more successfully.

Till the news of this awful event to their dear departed brother in Christ had reached him (he said), he had intended to direct their attention to such and such points—which he began to enumerate with most unlucky facility, so that he not only got out the first or opening paragraph of his written sermon, but before he well knew what he was doing, found himself far on into the second, and was going, for aught he could tell, right through to the end.

The absurdity of the business was overwhelming. He paused and shut up his manuscript, and stood face to face with the unknown depths of his oratory.

What happened for the next minute or two he does not know, and has taken care never to inquire, but the dread void was crossed at last, and then in yet one other minute he seemed to have entered on a new life—in a new world.

A new life? Nay, a double life; for he found himself at one and the same time speaking with irresistible eloquence, while also listening with

delight to the orator ; chastened, however, with awe, as wondering how long it might last.

He reviewed the deceased gentleman's history. He showed how he had begun life as a collier boy at seven years of age, earning five shillings a week, probably scorning to be a burden to his poor parents.

Here he was broken in upon by a couple of sharp, decisive coughs, and sounding so like 'Hear, hear,' that he could not but glance towards their source.

It was Israel Mort ! Delicious to the curate's heart was this first testimony of success. Israel Mort of all men was moved ! Israel, however, was thinking not of the curate but of David, his son, whom he had ordered to be here to-day, after the usual call to inquire about Mr. Jehoshaphat's state, expressly that he might benefit by the curate's praise of Israel's grand ideal man—this Jehoshaphat ; and so begin at once humbly to imitate him as Israel himself did.

The Overman's eyes were fixed sternly on David's countenance at this critical period of the sermon ; but the lad turned away sadly, gloomily ;

and gazed half in fear, half in hope, on the curate, as if not only he, but all the little world about them both, knew that to-morrow his father meant to compel him to work in the mine, and cease scholarship and play, unless the minister would help him.

The interruption acted on the minister's oratory as the weir outside acted on the little river—made it flow on more cheerily, vigorously, brightly.

Ah, this was life, he felt; this was reality! The orator, now as ever, in moving himself moved his auditory. Delicious moments! His face was a study—so full of natural truth and innocent hypocrisy. It was cold in colour, and sad and troubled in outward expression—as befitted the words he had to speak; while his soul all the while revelled in the heat and glow and grand movement beneath—a sort of gulf-stream passing below colder and stormier seas. Surely Jehoshaphat Williams himself might have been more content to die than he was could he but have known how, before his form was cold, the curate would speak of him; and, knowing nothing of Jehosha-

phat's very natural doubts about himself, fix his place, at once and for ever, alike on earth and in heaven.

‘As a boy passing from one humble position to another’—here Israel gave David another of his significant looks, and the curate another of his equally significant coughs, to the good man's great solace ; who began to think the devil really was not so bad as he was painted—‘As a boy,’ said the curate, repeating his words, ‘passing from one humble position to another, but always ascending a little ; then hewing away at the coal, while gathering the strength to hew out fortune ; then appointed a deputy—that is to say, to the first step in the government of his fellow-colliers ; then in a very few months rising to the full dignity of Overman.’

And there the curate turned full towards Israel, as if to make an illustration of him ; while Israel repaid the compliment by directing David's attention to the minister with a look that plainly said : ‘Mark that, boy. Listen to the parson.’

The curate went on with increased animation :—

‘Pausing not in the capacity of Overman, any

longer than sufficed to give him habits of command and larger practical knowledge, Jehoshaphat Williams obtained at last the onerous and honourable and profitable post of under-viewer ; and then all other steps were easy : agent or manager, part owner, sole owner, till his climax—his hour of apotheosis—as Member of the great British Parliament of his country.

‘ Here was another and signal example of the men who, self-made, became heroic captains of industry, giant pillars of our illustrious Temple of State.

‘ Doubtless there were spots even in Jehoshaphat’s sun. He was human and must err ; but, then, how else could God exercise his divine prerogative and forgive ? ’

He was reminded, too, ‘ that there had been sad accidents in past times. But mining was an empirical art, science only beginning to speak so that she could be listened to authoritatively.’

And so the curate reached his peroration—a glowing one (taken from the manuscript, and conned by rote beforehand)—upon the deceased gentleman’s charities ; and finally wound up

by asking himself why he repeated all these things.

He would tell them. He wanted to recall to their recollection the epitaph upon another great man in a metropolitan cathedral. He wanted to advise them, especially the young (here a kindly glance at David), to take the meaning of that epitaph to heart ; so that when strangers might come from afar on pilgrimage to the great man's grave in the churchyard outside these walls, and ask what had been the doings of him whom they so mourned, they might reply to them in a phrase which he translated for their benefit : ' Look around ! '

There were many moist eyes and handkerchiefs that afternoon in the little church. The curate's own eyes were still red when he emerged from the vestry into the churchyard with unusual celerity ; and where to his palpable surprise everybody waited to see him pass, the humbler members content to gaze and admire, while the more important shook hands with him and offered their congratulations.

One man only of the humbler class waited and watched for an opportunity to speak to the minister, and he was just that man whom the curate before his sermon would have supposed the very last to wish to speak to him. Israel Mort went boldly up, and held out his hand, which the curate grasped warmly, as he listened to the Overman's words :—

‘ Reverend sir, I haven’t been much in the way of sermons for a many years, but I want to thank you for yours, which has done me good. Some day I think you’ll find out how without my telling. It’s an old proverb—“Don’t cry before you’re out of the wood,” but I’d like to put another by the side o’ that one—“Don’t cry before going into the wood.” Do you take me, reverend sir?’

‘ Why—ah ! not exactly, Mr. Mort.’

‘ Don’t blow a trumpet to tell all the world of the great things you’re a-going to do.’

‘ Ah, yes—exactly, very good!’ responded the curate with a dubious smile, wondering whether the remark was intended for his or for the speaker’s own particular use.

‘ And David, sir, my boy, has also learned a

deal to day—or I'm much mistaken. Look up, lad, in the parson's face, and tell his reverence you mean to be a man some day.'

'Why not?' said the curate with a smile, while taking the boy's trembling fingers in his own, and noticing the wistful look in the lad's eye. 'Why not? Jehoshaphat Williams did these things—why not you?'

David could not speak. A tear was trembling within his lids, but he turned away to hide it from the curate's possible questioning, and from his father's certain anger.

'Come, David,' said the Overman, 'his reverence understands that you take kindly to the valuable hints he has given you. Mind, lad, that it doesn't want repeating. There may be too much of a good thing. I wish your reverence good afternoon.'

There was no emotion in the Overman's face. His eyes were as dry as his manners; and the tone and speech, though it seemed respectful—nay, grateful—rather puzzled the curate.

He looked after the retreating forms of Israel and David, and saw the former presently meet Mr. Griffith Williams; and he heard the loud

bluff voice of that gentleman telling the Overman to give him a call to-morrow at the farm.

Just for one moment the curate wondered indignantly what could be in Israel's mind to make him so obviously seek an appointment to-day, and to make it *there* of all places in the world ! In those sacred precincts ! Was he ambitious ?—he, the hard drudge who had never yet been known to have a single aspiration beyond that of his present post ?

But the curate forgot these thoughts in reverting to Israel's opinion of him, as shown by his attentiveness during the sermon, and his words since, which still puzzled him.

He was destined to be much more puzzled before night closed. He could not keep at home. And when out he could not keep in the solitary ways where he usually walked. He yearned to know what the world was saying about him—for his village *was* a world just then.

It was not, of course, that he wanted to be praised, or even to know, that men were praising him ; no, indeed, no ! But he was eager to learn if they appreciated the truths of his discourse. A

preacher, like an orator, must study, not only what he says, but how it affects those to whom he has spoken.

These thoughts led him, as the darkness of the evening grew, to pace along the banks of the little river, where, having reached the plain, it glides slowly between the colliers' cottages and the marsh on its way to the sea. Occasionally he would sit down on a piece of projecting rock under the high bushes, and again revel in the delight of the many fine things he was able to recall from the half impromptu sermon.

He was thus engaged when voices and advancing footsteps interrupted him. Two men and a boy became dimly visible as they emerged through the darkness, and approached the spot where he was reclining. Then they stopped as if about to separate.

He recognised the speakers as the village surgeon, Dr. Jolliffe, and Israel Mort.

They did not notice him, and he was glad, for he wanted to hear if they spoke about the sermon.

And this was what he heard :—

‘Certainly a most able man,’ observed the Doctor.

‘And a wonderful memory,’ responded Israel. ‘He would recognise anyone he had once talked to, aye, even twenty years after. I’ve known him do it.’

‘I don’t know much about his remembrances of friends, Mr. Mort, but he certainly never forgot an enemy.’

‘Ah!’ said the Overman, ‘a wise man! a truly wise man. He knew the world, Doctor.’

‘Do you know I never saw a man’s face and manners so unlike himself. The face round, innocent, chubby, I was going to say cherubinal—but at all events, if you couldn’t mistake him in that direction, you might easily suppose he was a jolly, good-tempered, prosperous farmer, with more live stock on his farm than ideas in his brain. Then, as to his manners, they were not merely agreeable, but there was this oddity about them, they were always the most agreeable and winning when saying or doing things that other people found particularly disagreeable.’

‘Was it known, Doctor, at the last, who would get the mine?’

‘Well, I know—and I suppose there can be no harm in telling you who have served him so long. He told me. And that was about the last communication he made to anybody in the world, for he died a few minutes after. He was obliged to choose between his wife and his brother, so Griffith Williams is in luck.’

‘Griffith Williams! I thought so. I was right then in my forecast. But, Doctor, did he say nothing about his wife—no share, or ——’

‘No,’ said the Doctor shortly.

‘Well, a great man has passed away. We ought to make much of him even now.’

‘You admire him, Israel! Why I thought you expected much from him, and got nothing beyond your bare hard-earned wages?’

‘I knew him all along, and knew that he knew me. So I wasn’t so much disappointed after all. There’ll be a grand funeral, I suppose?’

‘I expect so,’ assented the Doctor. ‘People collecting from all quarters, no doubt, to do him honour.’

‘Can he make much out of that, Doctor, in his grave in the churchyard yonder?’

‘Can’t say, I’m sure. Hark’ye, Israel, nobody knows better than you that all is not gold that glitters. If I were to tell you my candid opinion, I should say he would have a larger, grander, and altogether more appropriate funeral if the ghosts of all the people who have lost their lives prematurely under him were to come out of their graves and follow.’

‘I’d like to see that, too!’

‘Would you? You’re a bold man, Israel, to say so. But since you do say it, I believe you really would stand quietly by, and watch the whole grisly procession pass.’

‘Ay, but Doctor, I’d care most to see how Mr. Jehoshaphat looked at them—how he reviewed his troops!’

‘Ah well, good night! By the bye, does David really go to the mine to-morrow?’

‘Well, if he doesn’t he’ll have to give uncommon good reasons why.’

‘Good night, Mr. Mort.’

‘I’m going your way, Doctor. Come David.’

The curate watched their retreating forms with feelings that it would be difficult to do justice to.

This, then, was the true Jehoshaphat Williams, was it? This the hero he had so glowingly described!

Oh!—they were unjust—mistaken—prejudiced!

And yet he felt in his secret soul they spoke the truth—could have had no motive to do otherwise.

He felt sick with shame and humiliation. What! he of all men to have prostituted his priestly office, just when he dreamed he was fulfilling in all sincerity its legitimate demands!

He bent down his head into his hands and wept bitter, bitter tears.

How should he ever face the congregation again—if they knew of these things.

The curate was a good man. He had intended no wrong—no varnishing over of evil things. Somehow he had not only seen for the moment the things the world generally sees in a successful man, but he had also seen them under the kind of halo that sorrow will at times cast round such

persons—and that fact at once excused and condemned him in his own eyes.

After hours of sadness he went home, and spent the entire night wakefully in his bed, comparing the Doctor's speech with his own sermon, and with all the fine things he had said in it; striving piteously to see if they could in any way be reconciled, by the aid of a little Christian charity, in the interpretation of both.

CHAPTER IV.

PEKIN.

AFTER so painfully and so unconsciously enlightening the curate as to the value of his eulogy on the deceased Mr. Jehoshaphat, Israel and the Doctor separated, on reaching the plank bridge that crosses the stream.

From thence to Peking may seem a long distance, but Israel did not find it so, as he and his lad plodded their way thither through the village and entered a picturesque winding lane. This soon began to ascend towards an exceedingly long row of colliers' houses, that stood on a conspicuous height far above all the other rows, and above all the single houses scattered on the mountain slope; and commanded attention from every passing traveller by the grandeur of the position, and the bare homeliness of the dwellings.

The row had been built by Jehoshaphat Williams many years before, and named by him in one of his more grotesque moods—when, possibly, he thought he was playing the poet or the artist in associating his row of cottages, rented at a shilling or so a week, with the beauty and splendour of the great Chinese capital.

As they reached the ground in front of the cottages, and passed along the row of dimly-lighted windows, Israel stopped to speak with a collier, who was sitting on a doorstep, smoking, and looked—so David thought—as if he had been on the watch for the Overman. He rose to meet Israel, and they stood a little apart, speaking in low tones; but presently Israel spoke loud enough to let the boy know they spoke of Mr. Barrett, the manager of the mine under Mr. Jehoshaphat, and who was therefore Israel's immediate superior.

‘I can tell ye, he has seen old Mrs. Jehoshaphat; and what's more, that he has been hanging about the farm, trying to see Mr. Griffith Williams,’ said the collier, with a mysterious air.

‘Ay, ay!’ replied Israel, with a sardonic smile,

‘whichever on ’em gets the mine, he’ll be right, he thinks.’

‘But to be trying it on so soon, the old man just dead!’ added the collier.

‘Barrett takes time by the forelock. He doesn’t mean to lose a comfortable berth, not if he can help it,’ said Israel. ‘All right! I should do the same were I in his place.’

‘And that’s where you ought to be, master Israel, if everybody had their rights. You ought to be in his place.’

‘Ah, thou always wast a dreamer, Lewis; I ain’t time for such intellectoal recreations.’

Obedying a hint, however, from Lewis, Israel moved nearer to him and away from David, and then they again conversed in undertones, while Lewis looked more than once curiously at the boy.

A sudden sense of alarm ran through David’s breast. This man Lewis was in the habit of making extra earnings by teaching raw lads to cut coal, and had the character of being a cruel taskmaster.

David never stopped to think that he was not yet old enough for that kind of work. He

thought only he was going to be put under Lewis—that they were arranging it now—and thus to all his former horror of the mine there was now a deeper tinge added !

Israel, happening to look round, noticed the lad's stricken look, for the light of a candle, stuck just inside a window, fell full upon him ; but he did not trouble himself to enquire into the cause.

‘Go home,’ he said to David, ‘I will follow presently.’ He then went with Lewis into the latter's place.

David rushed on—right into his own home, and to his mother, who had long waited for him, and yearned to see and speak to him alone, and now found her opportunity as she thought.

But David gave her no time. His face was wild with excitement and affright.

‘Mother, he is talking to Lewis—it is about me—I am sure of it. He will bind me to him—and he will kill me !

‘Oh mother, mother, don't let me go down. Don't ! don't ! Let me do anything, anything in the world, but that !’

‘But David, dear ! Now listen—calm yourself ;

do my darling boy, my child—will you not listen to me?’

‘Oh yes, mother; but do say you will not let me go down to-morrow morning. Mother, you must speak now. I can’t go into the mine. I won’t. It would kill me. I can’t sleep at nights for it. And when I do, I jump up all at once out of the most horrid dreams. Last night I saw that boy who was lost only a few months ago in our mine for eight days, and found dead. He came to me, and whispered such things to me of how it had happened, and what he had seen! And when I awoke I do believe I heard my own voice screaming in fright.’

She noticed his hand was trembling, his eyes dilated and wild, his voice strange, unreal.

To quiet him, rather than with the faith that she could do any good, or even fulfil her promise, she said—

‘David, dear, I will—I will indeed! But be patient. I have found that always best with him.’

‘Mother, I can’t be patient if he makes me go *there!*’ He seemed to thrill and shudder as he

uttered the word 'there.' It included for him all that man could devise of things most cruel and most disgusting.

'But did you not say you would? Did you not promise him you would go down?'

David turned his head, and laid it against her breast, moaning with pain. He had utterly forgotten in his new fright the promise that had been exacted.

The door opened, and Israel came in.

David and his mother hastily separated, the former sitting down on a low stool, while the latter got ready the supper.

'You have heard the news of Mr. Jehoshaphat's death?' Israel said to his wife, after a pause.

'Yes,' Mrs. Mort replied. 'How will it affect you?'

'Fools can put questions that it takes wise men to answer, and are sometimes too much even for them. But, wife, I'll tell you. I've been pondering over that same question ever since I heard last night how bad he was. And it's on account of that I've been to church.'

‘To church!’ interrupted Mrs. Mort, caught for once in an expression of surprise.

‘To church!’ he repeated doggedly. ‘Have you anything to say to that?’

‘No, Israel; except that I am glad.’

‘What do you mean by that? Do you mean to insinuate—— but there, if you did, it wouldn’t matter. Only don’t interrupt me again. I think slow. You put me out.’

‘I am sorry,’ again interposed unlucky Mrs. Mort.

Israel’s brow coloured with ire. He no longer cared to go further with his wife into the new hopes that had been excited in him. And as he had long lost the relish of the one bit of occasional pleasure his married life at first gave him, the power of obtaining a patient and respectful listener whenever he wanted for his own ease of mind to talk himself out—he merely remarked :—

‘Come David, lad, eat! Get on wi’ thy supper!’

But the lad pushed his plate away, and said he wasn’t hungry—he couldn’t eat.

‘That’s nonsense,’ said Israel. ‘I’ve told thee before that those who do work, or mean to work, must eat. Eat thy victuals, and make no more ado.’

The lad’s face flushed, and he seemed as if he were about again to refuse ; but he caught the pleading look of his mother’s face, and did eat enough to satisfy the stern, inquisitive eye, so long as it thought it necessary to remain fixed on him.

‘And now, wife, about David. Have you made the lad understand about to-morrow ? That I don’t want to take a snivelling girl in boy’s clothes with me ; nor an idiotic coward, who sees a ghost lurking behind every corner. You know, and he knows, that my mind is made up. Is he man enough to keep his promise, and do his duty ?’

‘Give him time, he’s——’

‘Oh, I’ll give him till to-morrow morning, half-past five o’clock, certainly. That’ll do, David ?’

‘And is he to go under Lewis ?’ asked Mrs. Mort, tremblingly, but struggling to seem calm and self-possessed.

‘Lewis! Is the woman mad? Lewis! Certainly not!’ said the Overman, with a touch of scorn.

‘Israel—husband—we have had but three children; two are gone, and this one alone remains. If not for my sake, or for his, then for your own, be patient with him, listen to him and what he wants. He says he can work; he will work! Sometimes, husband, the poor silly lad talks of how he will yet grow to be a great man if only——’

‘That’s just what I want to put him in the way of. Do you suppose I mean to remain Overman all my life long, or that I mean my only son—heir to all I haven’t got, but mean to get—to remain where I shall first put him? No. And since I am in the mood to speak, you shall hear my mind, and think of it afterwards, when you see how things shall be shaped.

‘I want David to earn money because we are so wretchedly poor, and I can’t any longer do without. That’s one thing.

‘Next, it don’t suit me just now, or for some time to come, to look ambitious, and therefore I

choose to let everybody see my boy begin as I began, as all colliers begin, at the bottom. That's another thing.

'And now for the last thing. And if either of you dare to breathe a syllable of what I am about to say, I'll—well, I don't need to threaten. You both know me, so listen. I've been studying mines and mining to some purpose all these years, and now, if I don't miscalkelate, my time's come. And if so, it won't be long before David's time will come. He must get prepared then, as I have got, by hard work, and by never minding whether it's dirty work or ugly work. The gold'll be bright that'll come out of it all, and then David and I will see, wife, if things can't be made a bit more comfortable at home.'

Mrs. Mort's face happened to be turned away, so that he could not see it. But whether he had got to like the sound of his voice, or that the flavour of the ideal fruit he saw growing and glowing in the distance for his hands to pluck somehow humanized him a little, he said a few words more in the same strain, hardly thinking or caring, as he did so, how it might affect his listener. But

suddenly he heard a kind of gurgling sound in the throat, then a cry from David, and the next instant she was on the floor, fainting; the boy wild with alarm, and crying and sobbing to her—

‘Mother! mother! mother!’

Such a thing Israel was bound to confess to himself had not happened before for many years; so, after he and David had brought her round and quieted her, he gave her, in the shape of a warning as to the future, his full forgiveness, and kissed her.

Poor David soon saw there was no more hope for him of escape from the threatened doom; so, taking heart from the thought Israel had so skillfully suggested to him without seeming to do so, that he, boy as he was, might yet come to his mother’s aid, he spoke out right bravely—

‘Father, I will go to the mine in the morning when you call me.’

It was sufficient. Israel held out his hand; the lad came to it, took it, was lifted on to the father’s knee, and in the enjoyment of so novel a position forgot all he had been so determined upon a little while ago.

When David was about to go to bed, his father said to him quite unexpectedly—

‘I am well pleased with thee, lad. And I’m half inclined to give thee another day. The spring flowers are just coming out. I saw some children getting primroses and violets yesterday up by the Nine Bells level. So if you like, the motto shall be, “Play to-morrow, and work the day after.” It’ll be your last chance for a goodish while, lad.’

‘No, father,’ said David, in a grateful yet very hurried voice, as, conscious if he did not say ‘No’ quickly, he might not say it at all. ‘No, father; if I am to go, I’d like to feel I’d done it. Thank you all the same.’

‘And that’s manly, too. But if you don’t want a day for your own sake, I think you’d better take one for mine. I shouldn’t like to leave you long alone in the pit the first day, and I must go up to Griffith Williams early in the morning.’

David had heard enough. The words ‘leave you alone in the pit’ made him quite as anxious as his father could be that the dreaded event should be postponed to Tuesday.

As they parted for the night, Israel saw an odd

expression on his son's face that annoyed him, it seemed so plainly to say, 'Was my father trying to deceive me when he seemed so stern and determined about my going down to-morrow, and then when he talked about giving me a day's play for my own sake, so that I mightn't go down till Tuesday after all?' And Israel saw dimly glimpses of something never even thought of before in connection with aught belonging to him—glimpses of that new and wondrous world, a boy's mind in the first great era of development. '

'Wife,' said Israel, when the two were alone, 'go to bed. I mean to work for some hours—perhaps all night. Don't disturb me.'

She went away in silent submission; and if she wondered what he was about to do, took care to give him no indication as to her thoughts, either by word, look, or gesture.

He immediately cleared the table. Then he fetched an old portmanteau, out of which he took rolls of paper, pencils, pens, inks of different colours, red, black, and blue, a pair of compasses, a parallel ruler, and a variety of other things, the uses of which might not be very clear to a by-

stander, but which Israel perfectly understood the value of.

Then unrolling and spreading out on the table one of the bulkiest of the documents—a plan of some kind—he began to work upon it; his object being to transfer to its surface certain memoranda from his black, greasy note-book, the laborious work of his leisure and stolen hours during many years.

He went on thus, hour after hour, as patiently as an automaton might do, constructed for the purpose by some wondrous freak of science.

About daybreak his wife, who had not been able to sleep even for a single minute, could no longer resist the womanly impulse to go in, and look upon him, and see if he was warm, his fire burning, and whether she might not make him a cup of tea.

But when she had hastily dressed for this purpose, and got to the outside of his door, her heart failed her, remembering how often such impulses had ended in fresh bitterness of soul.

What might she not discover him doing that he did not wish anybody to know? Nothing

could irritate him more than that would. She would go back to bed.

And she did move away, but again returned. All the years of unhappiness she had passed with him seemed to glide away from her and be as if they had never been, when she remembered the kindly words of the last evening, and dwelt on the possible future to which they might lead, if she used them now with good sense and patient love.

She went in. Israel stared at her for a moment, whether in wonder or in sternness she could not tell ; but then went on with the work in hand, which was at that moment very interesting to him, and which he desired greatly to finish before stirring from his chair.

Timid, irresolute, she knew not how to speak ; so stirred his fire very quietly, and then slid out of the room.

In a few minutes she returned with a steaming and fragrant cup of tea, which she placed near him, on the one vacant spot of the table, and again went away.

He took it up, almost mechanically, and as if it were the most natural kind of thing to happen, and drank it down as rapidly as the heat would allow, and then again was absorbed in the work, when Mrs. Mort re-entered, and took away the cup, intending to refill it. That made the great man speak :—

‘No more, Molly! I am quite refreshed.’

‘Are you? I am so glad, Israel,’ said poor Mrs. Mort, terrified to death lest she should show her gladness too demonstratively.

‘Molly, lass, I meant what I said last night. Come here. Give me a kiss on the strength of my promise to think a little more about thee when I get time.’

She came, but could no longer restrain herself from laying her head on his shoulder, and clasping him within her loving arms and against that panting, sobbing, half-stifled breast, while she murmured—

‘Oh, dear, dear husband. I don’t think I shall live a many years, so be kind to me, kind I mean as you can.’

‘Well, that’s a reasonable request, and I’ll do what you ask. Do you know what I am at here all this night?’

‘No.’

‘Ah well, wait and you’ll see. Go back to bed, and get some sleep, and mind David. Fortify him for to-morrow.’

‘You have quite made up your mind about him?’

‘Quite!’

There was a half sigh, and that was all, as Mrs. Mort accepted her son’s fate, unconscious how much more, just then, she thought over and felt the seeming amelioration of her own.

Israel did not finish his labours till just the hour he had fixed on for his visit to Mr. Griffith Williams, and which was the very earliest that decency permitted.

He stood up and stretched himself to his full height, and yawned as if the relief other men get by a series of efforts, he was accustomed to take at once and have done with it. He then knelt down and dipped his bullet-head into a pail of water, rose alert, fresh, and ready for the day’s

work, which he felt instinctively must be momentous.

When he had cleaned himself and put on his best clothes, and was ready to start, he took up the plan on which he had been working for so many hours, and which he had left till then to get thoroughly dry, rolled it tightly up, and held it in his hand with the air of a man who feels an unwonted treasure in his grasp. He felt something akin perhaps to what the young officer feels when his first sword is put into his hand, or the emotion may be likened to that which the field-marshal experiences when he knows the bâton to be his own at last, by the best of evidences, the exulting clutch of the wand by the eager fingers.

Some such thought must have struck Israel, for he stopped and mused to himself,—

‘Now if I wanted to persuade a man who might either become a friend or an enemy that I was myself unarmed, and particularly innocent like, should I go and flourish a sabre in his face to begin with?’

Israel answered himself, as he so often answered others, by silence and action. He had already

restored to the portmanteau all the things he had taken out of it except the plan which he had so long laboured over ; now he put that back too, and set off without it to see Mr. Griffith Williams, expecting to steal a march upon Mr. Barrett, the agent, whose business hours, and habits, he well knew.

CHAPTER V.

COMING TO THE POINT.

LEFT an orphan to the care of his vigorous but very unsentimental brother Jehoshaphat, who was many years his senior, Griffith Williams had at first tried the hard labour of the pit, but given it up, to his brother's great offence, and become a farm-labourer.

And so he remained, till the brother's more fortunate career began to make the contrast unpleasant to the successful man, who then gave Griffith a small but sufficient income—helped him to his great desire, a thoroughly good education, and when that was attained, showed a sort of pride in his recognition of the clever, gentlemanly fellow he had, as he thought, at last created out of a great hulking ploughman.

What else he might have done for him never

came to the test ; happily, perhaps, for Griffith ; who married a farmer's daughter, a notable, bustling, domesticated woman, with good looks, an excellent temper, and a considerable fortune. Her father had concealed from her alike his power and his will to enrich her ; fearing she might otherwise become the victim of some marriageable bird of prey. He was pleased with her choice, and left them when he died 'The Farm,' and everything in the world he possessed.

Griffith was now a gentleman. He read much, travelled occasionally, spent money freely whenever appealed to in behalf of any good cause, and then, after all, began, at the age of forty, to find his life a burden, without knowing why.

His wife was an excellent woman, and he devotedly attached to her, in spite of her deficiencies in the character of a lady. His three children were of striking beauty, and revelling in good health ; what, then, was the secret cloud that ever veiled from him the true value of all his advantages ?

It was this : Griffith was at once sensitive and proud, and had discovered that others, in knowing

these traits of his character, took a malignant pleasure in making the worst use of them.

He had fallen, he found, between two stools. The gentry with whose tastes and means his own were most in accord took no notice of him, but seemed to think the poor farm-labourer of yesterday was essentially the same man still, only grown rich. The little farmers on their side, men of hard laborious life and unrefined habits, ever fighting against poverty, or the fear of it, looked upon him as an upstart, even while they were obliged to acknowledge he was no discredit to their order. At every local agricultural show and contest, Griffith and his labourers were always foremost in showing what good farming meant by practical examples, and by winning a large proportion of the prizes offered ; incidents that scarcely improved the temper of those whose inferiority they illustrated.

Thus baffled in his very natural aspirations, and resenting the injustice of his neighbours, he grew restless, solitary, reserved in his habits, took depressing views of things, became morbidly suspicious. And, to make matters worse, he

cultivated that troublesome thing, conscience, till it became, according to its custom, a power formidable to its owner, since he did not attempt to make it formidable in a more legitimate way, that is, in using it for the conquest of the many evils he saw about him.

There was one exception to this. He did once attempt to open Jehoshaphat's eyes to the condition of the children in his mine; and that gentleman made the interference so extremely unpleasant to the offender, that not only was the offence never repeated, but from that time the brothers ceased to hold any but the most formal and necessary communications with each other.

Thus Griffith's impulsive goodness and conscientiousness came to nothing, or very little; and at the same time he found men looked upon him, on the whole, as having a keen eye to his own advantage, and as ready to take deep offence against insults or injuries, real or supposed.

Such was Griffith Williams, the man who now owned the colliery, and who lives in the very loveliest neighbourhood, and the most picturesque

old manor house, perhaps, that could be found in half a dozen shires—‘The Farm’—distinguishingly so called, in reference to its superior dignity to all the other and smaller farms of the neighbourhood.

The most striking feature of the range of mountains that here for so many miles face the sea is the undulations of their sky line. A mountain rises to a considerable height, with a rounded central crown; the slopes, right and left, forming valleys, which reascend to other and similarly-crowned mountains—thus valley and mountain succeed at near intervals, each after each; but with such infinite changes in the general form and direction of their intervening double slopes, and of their lovely and wild streams of water, that it is an unending pleasure to go from one to another, finding ever fresh beauty the further you go.

And what a world of sweet solitude awaits you if you go right up some of these valleys till you reach their highest points; what a world of picturesque splendour if you then also ascend the heights near, and gaze over the interminable

panorama of mountains and valleys, and the all-encircling sea !

On the very edge of one of these wild streams, and near the bottom of one of these exquisite valleys, Griffith's house and farm was situated.

All their beauty and grandeur, however, are non-existent for Israel, as he approaches the Farm through fields and by footpaths ; but for all that he looks keenly around him, taking note of every object that may help him to understand better the habits and views of the owner.

He meets people hurrying past in unusual silence and gravity, but he knows them and asks no questions. One is an undertaker, another the sexton of the church, another a woman a dress-maker, all illustrating, to Israel's cynical mind, the notion what new life death puts into many people.

A high bank encircles the Farm on the side by which the Overman approaches, and not being deep in the mystery of the preservation of man-gold wurzel, he wonders what can be the meaning of the bulging slope stretching nearly to the top

of the bank, and why it is thatched so beautifully across the whole breadth of the field.

Above this bank is the hedge, then over that an oak-tree, now bare of foliage, through which we can see a mound, which admits only the top of the house to be visible, and which consequently prevents those inside the house from seeing the magnificent sweep of the sea, unless they go to the mound for the express purpose. Israel discovers this peculiarity ; and it seems greatly to tickle his fancy.

He now reaches a wide gate, which he opens, and in an instant half a dozen dogs are in full bay, their voices resounding so as to charm a huntsman, but which are not at all agreeable to Israel, as he finds them closing in upon him, snuffing at his clothes, touching his calves, and seeming to be the more dangerous just as they become less noisy ; a trait that Israel perfectly understands.

He waits, however, calm, watchful, immoveable, his hand ready, his eye passing over their eyes, giving no sign of fear or hostility, though prepared to brain or to throttle in an instant, if he

had occasion, and behold! the dogs are presently at peace with him, and one of them even thrusts his cold nose into Israel's hands.

That business over, the Overman pauses in uncertainty as to the right way to go. He doesn't want to show himself at the principal front, which he can see a little way off, and he does want to slip in by the servants' entrance which he cannot find.

The noise of the dogs perhaps will bring somebody out, so he will wait a minute or two.

The Farm is pretty well all before him now. On his left, under arching oaks of the most picturesque character, are ducks diving and wing-shaking in the stream at the base of the great trees.

On his right runs the shrubbery, where over the evergreens are snowberries dancing gaily in the sun and wind.

A second, but smaller gate, with an exceedingly smooth path of the richest mahogany colour inside, seems to lead to the part of the house facing the mound. He tries the gate, but finds it locked.

He moves on, dubious as to whether he had not better go right up to the chief entrance ; and a few yards brings him within sight of the side of the house, which is long, has quaint windows half covered with ivy, and a high terrace-wall pierced with arches right through the immense thickness, immediately in its front.

Beyond this he sees another external gate, and a very handsome Tudor arch, showing the limits of the farm on that side.

Still no one comes, and still Israel is fain to look about him, and study a place so novel and just now so interesting to him for many reasons.

But his eye wanders listlessly over the long trough, that carries water rushing eagerly along at a level below his feet ; at the thatched shed raised on short squat pillars ; at the long low-roofed line of stables ; at the grand-looking massive steps that lead after all only to a loft ; at the low walls on either side reaching to his knee ; at the fresh series of odd-shaped places and buildings that become suddenly visible at a lower level ; at the quaint bell hanging just under the eaves which calls the labourers to and from meals

and work ; at the noisy cackling hens, and stately crowing cocks, that are pushing their beaks in everywhere, and mounting high upon everything ; when suddenly a light step is heard behind ; he turns and sees David.

The boy advances to meet him, and show the way ; laughingly, yet also a little excitedly ; and explaining that he had seen the squire (for so people began to call Mr. Griffith Williams) while he was seeking wild flowers, and that he asked him about his father, and was pleased to hear he was coming up to the Farm.

Israel looked at the lad so long and fixedly that David changed colour, and wondered if he was suspected of lying ; but his father's thoughts were far away, travelling slowly but firmly towards the promised land he had so long made the goal of his life.

‘ Do you know,’ at last he said, ‘ if Mr. Barrett, the manager, has been here ? ’

‘ Oh, yes sure ! He's in there now with Mr. Griffith Williams.’

‘ I meant to have been first. I ought to have been,’ Israel muttered to himself. ‘ Go on, David.’

David went on before him, through the long but narrow hall : the father seeing nothing of the pictures between which he passed, or of the busts over the doors, or of the painted glass window that admitted a dim, rich light from the conservatory, while his son not only saw all these, but much more (for which he must have been indebted to his fancy), if we may judge from his subsequent report to his mother of this, to him, wonderful day.

At the further end David felt obliged to point out to his father the noble stag-horns that were suspended over the door through which they were about to enter.

‘ He killed the stag, father, and saved the life of the huntsman,’ cried David, enthusiastically.

‘ He—who?’

‘ Mr. Griffith Williams, father.’

‘ Oh!’ responded Israel, and invited no further particulars ; so David, obliged to be silent, opened the door and went in first, as if already he felt at home, until he remembered this was his last holiday ; then he went out again.

The place dazzled the Overman. Spending the

greater part of all the daylight that life afforded him in the mine, the blaze of illumination that now burst upon his eyes ‘dazed him,’ as he said, when he got home again, and found somebody to speak to. The room seemed all window, and to bring the glowing valley, the dancing wild stream, the broad marsh, and the double and vying splendour of the sea and sky into startling closeness.

He found then the builder of the house had known what he was about, and had only left the view closed from one spot that it might not interfere with a still finer view from another.

Mr. Griffith Williams was a stout, handsome man, with light curling hair and beard. He wore a short brown velvet shooting-coat, and had a gun lying across his knee, as though he had been interrupted while examining it.

He sat at a large round table, on which were writing materials, and a big tin box, labelled outside ‘Jehoshaphat Williams, Esquire.’ This had evidently just come from the deceased gentleman’s lawyers; and from it had been taken a number of papers and bulky documents by a person who

stood by as its custodian, and handed them as required by the heir.

‘Our firm, sir’—so the gentleman was saying as Israel was introduced, and sat down immediately in the most unobservable corner he could find—‘thought, as you are sole heir, and as some of these things may demand immediate attention, we ought not to wait for the customary occasion of handing everything over, but see you at once, and take your instructions.’

‘Quite right. Many thanks. You will, of course, continue to act for me as you did for my brother.’

The gentleman gave a most profound bow, breathed as if he lived again, and a heavy fear had been lifted from his mind.

Israel also drew a deep breath. The affair struck him as ominous and unpleasant. The same sort of dealing would renew Mr. Barrett’s lease of office; who, if he did not leave now, would probably stick to the colliery quite the natural term of Israel’s life.

He noticed, too, that Griffith Williams had seen him, and had not thought proper to notice him.

But where was the manager? He saw nothing of him. Had he already settled everything with Mr. Griffith Williams, and gone away home?

At that moment Mr. Barrett came into the room; and in a bustling, confident sort of way, implying the best possible understanding with his employer, went to him and the lawyer; and then, after exchanging a few words with the former, came across the room to where Israel was at its furthest extremity, and said to him—

‘Mr. Griffith Williams can’t see you to-day; but to-morrow, perhaps, he may spare a minute or two.’

‘Oh, very well!’ said Israel, rising, hat in hand.

‘Can I do what you want?’ asked the manager, not exactly in an offensive way, but looking, Israel thought, as if wondering at his impudence in coming there.

‘No, sir, thank you. My business isn’t so important but it can wait.’ And staying no further question, away he went, in the direction of his own home.

But not for long did he keep in that direction. When he had got so far from the Farm as to be sure no one from thence could distinguish his movements, he turned short round by a lane, re-entered the valley, but on the other side of the stream, and favoured by the thick undergrowth, was able to reach a spot within full sight of his employer's house, without himself incurring the risk of being seen.

He then sat down on the round trunk of a felled oak-tree, took out his watch, and made some calculations, then drew forth his pipe, and began to smoke slowly, meditatively.

‘Well,’ said he to himself, after a long pause, ‘Barrett has got his chance—and he had best make use of it, for he shall never have another, not if ——’

He puffed again in silence and anxious thought.

‘I’ll stay here at any rate till he comes out again—ay, if it be night first. Make your mind easy on that point, Mr. Barrett!’

Half an hour passed—an hour—two hours—and still no Mr. Barrett appeared.

Israel, at his tree, felt something like the Indian

at the burning stake, but like him evinced no emotion.

The labours, and sacrifices, and hopes, and disappointments of long years were again being gone through, as he saw that each hour's delay of the agent with his employer made it more and more sure that the ground was being cut away from under his feet—that ground where he had proposed to stand a new man, and from which he had intended to start on a new career.

Still he puffed away with no perceptible emotion or impatience, beyond the occasional shifting of his legs, or the rise for a moment to one knee, to look out through the opening he had found among the bushes.

And even when he did see Barrett come out at last from his long audience, only those who might have noticed Israel's face dimly illuminated as by a light suddenly passed across it and gone would have perceived anything noticeable in the way he rose to his full height, and stood apparently considering, for a little space, which way he should go. In reality, he was measuring with exactness Mr. Barrett's retreating steps, so that

he might judge how long he would be passing out beyond the far gate ; and how soon Israel might start forth again, without risk of being seen by the agent, on his determined purpose to confront Mr. Griffith Williams in his house.

That time soon came. Israel descended the slope, leapt over the stream, and began to ascend the valley a little, preparatory to a descent upon the house, so as to evade all danger of a meeting with Mr. Barrett. And then, to Israel's great satisfaction, he and Mr. Griffith Williams met in the pathway leading past the Farm up towards the mountain height.

The greeting on the squire's side was genial, yet with a smack of condescension ; on Israel's it was deferential, but manly, almost stern.

‘ Shall we sit down here—pointing to a little knoll—or go into the house ? ’ asked Griffith.

‘ All places are alike to me, sir,’ responded Israel ; and, following his employer's example, he sat down. And as his lack-lustre eye (when unexcited) fell on the foliage and water of the beautiful valley, he really seemed to see no difference between it and his own familiar mine.

‘ Well now, Mort, what is it you want to say to me? Speak out, and straightforwardly, for— ’

‘ Did you ever know me to do anything else, sir?’ asked Israel, as if really curious to be answered, but with no show of anger.

‘ Well—no. But you are aware it is against all discipline for inferior officers to make complaints against superior ones.’

‘ Better that,’ said Israel, interrupting the speaker, ‘ than, for lack of complaining, to let inferior and superior be all blown up together.’

‘ Why, Israel, man! you do not, cannot, mean that things are so bad as that.’

‘ I mean, sir,’ said Israel, looking aside and down, not at all as in fear, but as if engaged in some mental effort, that required all possible abstraction from externals, ‘ that for a long time past the colliers have made the two deputies miserable by their continual alarms, now about one thing, now about another. I mean that the deputies have been trying in the same way to scare me, and I have felt obligated so far to listen to them as to call Mr. Barrett’s special attention to a number of things that want to be seen to,

and which he does see to by treating the mine as a tinker treats a tin-kettle with a worn-out bottom—by soft sawder. I mean, sir, that as none of us, therefore, can get satisfied without going to head-quarters—why, to head-quarters I come, as it's my duty to do. It's your property, you know, sir, but it's our lives at stake.'

The eyes of the two men met—Griffith's troubled with many thoughts, Israel's luminous with one thought; he was coming to the point at last.

'And are the necessary operations so very heavy?' asked the former.

'I want you, sir, to come to the mine and judge for yourself.'

'I! What's the good of that? I am no judge. I hate the mine. I mean the details.'

'You are owner,' said Israel, with something like reproof.

Griffith's eyes glanced enquiringly, but unconscious they were doing so, in Israel's, and then at his own dress, and then again at Israel's, but dropped them suddenly to the dog lying at his feet.

However slow might be the thoughts of the Overman, his instincts were keen and quick, and he at once guessed and tested the nature of his employer's speculations by saying—

‘If, sir, you will say you will come down, I will take care that everything shall be made as little disagreeable as possible.’

‘Tell me, Israel, candidly, is there any danger?’

‘Certainly not.’

‘You can guarantee that?’

‘With my life,’ said Israel with a smile—a most unusual phenomenon on his face—‘if that were any good to you.’

‘Don’t imagine me a coward, Israel.’

‘Certainly not, sir,’ responded Israel, passing his hand over his face at the same moment.

‘No, Israel, I don’t think I am a coward. I can hunt with a horse that most men would refuse to mount, and leap anything that can be leaped; I can bear pain; I could go into battle, and decently, at least, play my part. These things lie, or might lie in my way. But the mine!—well, Israel, you know as much of my history as most men, and know how I shrank from it in

youth, and I don't find my love grow for it in maturer age.'

'Ay, but for all that there's more to be got out of her now than as yet there ever has been gotten,' remarked Israel, patting the sword with his right hand, as if that were the mine below; and following the remark by such a glance at Griffith as the marksman gives who fires at some noble prey, and waits to see if it is about to fall.

'What's that you say?' hastily demanded Griffith. He had already risen to his feet, and turned his face towards home, but again turned, and stood rooted to the spot.

'Will you come to the mine to-morrow, sir?'

'Impossible! it would not be decent till after the funeral.'

'Well, sir, when shall we meet?'

'You and I to be alone?'

'Oh no; I think you should see the people, and they ought to see you.'

'And what about Mr. Barrett?'

'Of course he'll be there, sir.'

Griffith seemed more and more to be lost in the tangles of his own thoughts, or else in the dis-

turbed aspect that Israel's presence, looks, words, and behaviour seemed to cast over them. This reply puzzled him exceedingly.

Certainly he wanted to hear whatever Israel had to say, and he saw he must let him say it in his own time and manner. But he did also want not to seem mean or ungentlemanly to his manager, Barrett. He had been busily thinking how to compass both ends at the same time, when lo! Israel set at nought his forethought by saying, as if it were the simplest thing in the world, that of course the manager would be present.

After giving his employer ample time to realise the force of this remark, Israel said—

‘I will, by your leave, sir, call on him as I go home, and say I have asked you to meet him and me, and that you have consented to come.’

‘If so, he will be here presently, and either require the project to be given up so far as you are concerned, or resign.’

‘Or—resign!’ echoed Israel; but Griffith could not, for the life of him, tell whether the tone meant something of wonder, or a good deal of submission.

‘What should I do, then?’ asked Griffith, a little maliciously, as he surveyed the Overman.

‘I don’t think you will need to ask that question, sir, after our meeting.’

So said Israel Mort, and not a tone, look or gesture escaped him that could imply that he felt trapped like a fox in his wiles. His employer could, in fact, almost fancy the Overman’s mind was already far beyond the point where he (Griffiths) was pausing in speculation. It seemed to him that Israel was waiting impatiently for them to begin together some new undertaking, some grand commercial march, that might lead to wealth, such as the owner of the Farm and of the mine had never yet dared to think of.

He shook hands hastily with Israel, and then they separated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LAST HOLIDAY.

AFTER leaving his father at the Farm, David knew not what to do with himself. The excitement of that visit had for the moment made him forget his overhanging trouble, but now it all returned upon him.

He no longer thought of the day as a holiday. Should he go home? No, he dared not trust himself to spend the time there. He felt that it was better his mother should not have his pale face before her, to strike fresh trouble into her eyes whenever they chanced to fall on it.

He wandered listlessly about, and his feet led him, as if by a will of their own, to the little wood he had passed through lately, so happy and confident in his strength and sense of safety and freedom.

He sat down on the root of a chestnut tree, which had a thousand little branches with silver tips glistening in the sun.

The birds sang in it, undisturbed by the mournful little form below—the sun shone very warmly, the wild flowers smelt pleasantly in the breeze, in fact all things in the wood went on—it seemed to David—with the old story of ‘Live and be happy!’—‘Live and be happy!’ like the flattery of a hypocritical friend, unaware that he has been found out. The boy lent a sullen ear to this old story, and turned a pale, sullen cheek to the breeze, as if he regarded its soft touch as the kiss of a Judas. In his suffering and unreasonable young heart, David felt most bitter and angry against all the sweet and tender influences which this little wood had had over him ; making him for so many years hope such peaceful and delightful things and ignore stern facts and probabilities.

Some way below him he saw a little girl gathering primroses that lit a narrow stream, before the sun had time to reach it. His eyes were just as gloomy as ever when they fell upon her, though he knew her well, and had for her all the

affection a brotherless and sisterless lad could have for his first friend. But he remembered now as he watched her, that that fatal belief in a charmed life, the hopes of being providentially spared the hardship that had come upon most of his schoolmates as childhood departed, had been greatly strengthened and encouraged by the companionship of this little flower-gatherer. So David looked at her with bitter eyes, for he could not help looking at her ; she was much too pretty a sight for him to keep his eyes away. Her tiny wandlike figure in her violet frock was the most graceful thing in the wood, and would have been the loveliest bit of colour there but for the hair that fell over it, and that the wind blew in all directions as she moved, and often drew it in one golden cloud upwards, as if trying to lift her by it from the earth, to which she scarcely seemed to belong. Her hat had been taken off to form a basket for her flowers. Her face was wonderfully animated, considering her loneliness, and the quietness of her occupation ; it kindled and waned like a star down there in the wood all by itself ; and it was impossible for David not to keep

looking at it, though he said in his heart bitterly, that this was one of the false prophets which had so misled him.

Suddenly the little primrose-gatherer caught sight of him, and hailed him with a prolonged bird-like cry of his name, broken up into shakes, and rising into the shrillest of silvery sounds at the last syllable of it, after having gone almost startlingly low just before.

‘Da-a-a-a-a-a-a-vid!’

In the new dignity of his sorrow, David leaned his head upon his hand, his elbow on his knee, and tried to consider the childish greeting as beneath his notice, unworthy his attention.

He could not, however, resist peeping gloomily through his fingers, to see how his little friend took such unusual treatment.

She looked puzzled, then troubled, and was for threading her way up to him through the brambles, when three small shock-headed children coming along by the stream made her afraid to leave her primroses. She ran back to them, and busied herself in making them into two bundles,

which, by dint of squeezing them out of all life and form, she managed to hold in her small hands.

Still appearing abandoned to grief and gloom, David watched her coming towards him, dividing her attention between her two bouquets, which she carried well in front of her with great care and pride, and indeed was so absorbed in them as to fail to look to her footing, so that she slipped several times before reaching him.

Coming close in front of David she stooped, and her small face growing wide-eyed and excited in anticipation of his enjoyment, touched his nose with one of her bunches of primroses.

David turned his face impatiently away.

The child looked puzzled and grieved; then, as if with sudden inspiration, stooped again and applied the other bunch. The nose was turned away still more impatiently.

This appeared to astonish the little would-be comforter beyond expression.

After gazing at his face with her knees still bent before him, she glanced perplexedly first at one of her closely-packed bunches, then at the

other, to see if the fault by any chance could lie with them.

Assured apparently of the impossibility of this, she looked again at David, and comforted herself with the thought that he was absorbed in some difficult lesson, as she had often known him to be. But he had no book—perhaps then he was only pretending to be sulky, and would shout and jump at her in a moment to startle her. She therefore suddenly stepped aside a little, with her bright eyes fixed on him in merry suspicion, one foot so planted, and her body so leaning away from him as to be ready for instantaneous flight.

David's continued silence, however, giving her courage, she ventured to approach on tiptoe and shout in his ear in the shrill fairy treble—

‘David!’

This having no effect, she went round and called in the other ear in the deepest fairy bass—

‘David!’

The bowed head remaining apparently insensible still, a slight frown of pain and perplexity began to knit the delicate golden eyebrows, while the lips quivered, and then compressed; and giving

way suddenly to her fear and wonder, the child threw herself on her knees before David, uttering passionate repetitions of his name with hysterical laughter, and beating the primroses against his arm—

‘David ! David ! David !’

‘Go away, Miss Williams,’ said David, looking up suddenly, stung by the sound of her laughter, and speaking with unkind vehemence—‘go away—I hate unfeeling girls !’

At this the flowers were dropped, and the little figure retreated till its back touched a stripling oak-tree, against which it leaned, drawn up on its toes, and gazing at David in the greatest wonderment.

At last the eyes, wide with surprise and pain, began to show the glitter of a babyish tear in each, and a baby finger was placed on the lips which tremblingly ejaculated—

‘Well, if ever— !’

The grief and amazement expressed in these words, and the patient silence following them, made David suddenly remorseful for the pain he was inflicting in his own selfish sorrow.

‘I didn’t mean to be cross, Nest,’ he said gently, ‘but I wish you’d go away.’

‘Why?’ asked Nest, ‘whatever have I done, David?’

‘Nothing,’ answered David impatiently. ‘Only it’s no use you staying here. You know nothing about trouble. Go away. Oh! I wish you’d go away.’

A mournful intelligence danced in Nest’s blue eyes. She began to understand the grievance David had against her. She knew she was very ignorant in comparison with David, and often offended him because she always preferred playing to trying to learn the things he wished to teach her; and she felt that now he had indeed touched upon a truth it behoved her to be very much ashamed of.

‘Oh! how much I wish I knew,’ she thought, ‘and then David would talk to me instead of sending me away.’

She leaned her back against the tree, and looked sadly upward with her hands behind her, because she had seen many a child at the village school (which she often visited as an idle little lady)

seem to find out a forgotten lesson by staring up at a corner of the ceiling, and Nest used to wonder if the angels wrote it there for the poor little dunce, and then rubbed it out very quickly, for Nest had seen nothing when she looked but the fly-marks and the damp-stains.

But though Nest put her hands behind her and looked up in the same manner she had seen the little ones at school do, no clue to the mystery that perplexed her met her earnestly seeking, piteous blue eyes; on the contrary, everything seemed joyously evading the question of her heart—what trouble might be?

The bright sky bore no token of any such thing; the birds seemed to know nothing whatever of the subject, nor to think it worth enquiring into; the very young small leaves about her, all looked as innocently ignorant as Nest herself.

Finding thus no enlightenment anywhere, Nest turned to David suddenly, and sitting down beside him, gave his arm a vehement grasp with her tiny hands, and leaned a pale, determined face against his shoulder.

‘I know I don’t know what trouble is David,’ she said, ‘but don’t send me away; I *want* to know—and I *will* know.’

At first David stared at her, then laughed, then his eyes, with the laughter still in them, filled with tears, and he laid his hands on her shoulders exclaiming with a voice as strong as if he had never a grief in him,—

‘You don’t know, and you *shan’t* know—from me—you dear, dear little thing!’

Nest, however, resisted such patronising pity, and pressing to him, besought earnestly that he would tell her what trouble was.

‘Yes, David—I do want to know—make me know what it is.’

‘That I will never!’ declared David still more manfully, as he kissed her and smiled over her entreating face. ‘No! she shan’t know what it is from me; no, not if I had to be blown up in the mine every other day, and drowned the days between, and come alive again every night!’

‘Ah!’ cried Nest, with a sharp ring in her baby voice. ‘*Now* I know. Oh! David; you’ve got to go and work in the mine!’

‘Well, and if I have,’ returned David, ‘what of that?’

Nest stared at him amazedly, for she had well known his horror at such a fate.

‘You didn’t suppose it was that I was miserable about, *did* you now?’ asked David, firm in his determination to deceive her.

‘Yes I did, David,’ answered Nest frankly.

David laughed and said—

‘Oh! you stupid!’

‘Then what is it?’ enquired Nest, still dubious.

‘Why, Tom Evans will get the prize through me leaving school of course; that’s what’s put me out.’

‘And that’s all?’ asked Nest.

‘There’s *twelve* striking,’ said David, jumping up, ‘and I’ve got to meet father soon;—come along—look sharp!’

Nest rose, and gave him her hand, and they went together through the wood.

They did not get along very quickly, for David, in spite of his injunction to Nest to hurry, soon slackened his pace, and showed a decided inclination for loitering.

As they went, David chatted in quite a cheerful manner, till some of the courage which he had assumed for her sake began really to cheer and strengthen his heart.

Nest, with a perception beyond her years, not only suspected something of the truth, but also understood it was better for David that he should not know she suspected it.

On this account she answered to all David said as cheerfully as possible. To do this her answers had to be very prompt and very brief; and she kept her eyes widely open to the sunlight, so that anything like tears might, she thought, be ashamed to appear there.

No one watching these two, and hearing their talk, could have guessed that they were both engaged in trying to deceive each other as earnestly as grown-up people might.

David now saw his father in the distance, and fearing what he would say, moved to take leave of Nest suddenly, as if he must hasten to him. He therefore said good-bye almost more carelessly than Nest could bear.

She clutched his hand very tightly, nor would

all the staring she could do keep the tears back any longer. David let her keep his hand, but smiled, and would not trust himself to look at her.

Both children suffered, though David's new courage still remained with him, but the chill breath of pain was blowing for the first time on Nest's life in its all frail blossom, and shaking it cruelly.

Both had a vague sense which neither could have expressed, that the childish paradise the wood behind had been to them was closed for ever, and that some invisible angel stood there preventing their return.

At last David took her hat from her trembling hands, and tied it on, pretending not to notice how her little throat swelled and tightened under the strings. Then, looking at her brightly, he patted her on both cheeks, and strode away as fast as he could towards the Overman, feeling as bold and triumphant as a soldier who, hastening to hot battle, has half succeeded in persuading the woman he loves that there will be no fighting where he goes.

Nest lingered a moment, then set off running towards her home; but as she went faster than her strength would let her go for many yards, she soon stopped and sat down in the grass at the side of the road, where she allowed her tears to fall as fast as she could wipe them away with her pinafore.

After this she rose and walked homewards with feeble but demure and womanly steps, looking no longer for the angel's writing in the corner of the sky.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF THE PLANS.

WHILE Israel, after leaving the farm, paced along slowly through the little wood, in labouring thought, towards the village to execute some errand which had been entrusted to him by the manager, and which had given him the opportunity to be away from the mine without danger of exciting comment, who should he see but the manager himself turn the corner by the nearest houses, and begin to ascend the hill towards the Farm.

Barrett was evidently hurrying his movements ; his face looked red, and a long roll of paper was in his hand.

A dusky light, the ghost of a smile, passed over Israel's face as he said to himself, 'Plans, of course ! I forgot that two could play that game !'

Israel moved a few steps aside out of sight; then, after a brief pause, he returned, took just one glance after the fast-retreating figure, and began himself to walk towards his own cottage at a pace that would have excited the astonishment of any of the neighbours who might have seen him, and remembered that never in their whole lives before had they beheld such a spectacle as Israel sweeping along at the rate of a prize pedestrian.

But even this speed did not appear to satisfy him, for he stopped suddenly before an aged but still hale man, who was smoking as he leaned against the threshold of his door, and addressed him—

‘Martin, I am wanted up at the squire’s just now, and have left something at home. Will you fetch it for me, and bring it up?’

‘O ay! But I can’t go very fast now-a-days, Master Israel.’

‘No. How long must I give you? You won’t have to wait there.’

‘Ten minutes ’ll take me there, say five to stop—that’s a quarter—and then there’s the hill, worse

luck, I can't manage that with my short breath, under half an hour.'

'Three-quarters altogether, too much I fear. But there's no help. Quick then. Go yourself to my bedroom, unlock the big box you'll find there—here's the key—and take out a roll tied with red tape! There are other rolls, but the one tied with red tape is the right one. Red tape, mind! When you have got it, lock the box again—bring back the key, with the roll, and bring both up yourself, unless you can find some one you can trust who will move more quickly. David, my boy, will do, if you can find him, or anyone who is strong and swift, and can run the whole way up. I shall give you a shilling, and if you can find another to help I shall give him a shilling too. But then I shall expect it at the Farm in half an hour.'

He took out his watch.

'It is now just upon twelve. You will send it by half-past, or bring it by a quarter to one?'

'I will.'

Israel paused just to see the old man start, which he did with creditable energy; then he

re-entered the wood, and saw in the distance David, and a little girl, that looked like Nest, just separating. David came running to meet him. Asking no questions about his companion, Israel bade him go as fast as he could home, and bring up to the Squire's the roll that old Martin had gone to take from the big box.

‘Run David, thou know'st not how much depends on thy speed.’

Away went David, and then Israel himself turned and ascended the hill with extraordinary rapidity ; never pausing from fatigue, never panting from want of breath, but with his wiry, muscular frame evidently capable of far greater efforts than any he was putting forth.

Presently he overtook the postman, who asked him if he was going up to the Farm, and would take the Squire's letters.

‘Yes,’ was the reply.

While the letters were being sorted out, Israel put forth his finger and touched a letter that the postman kept passing by.

‘For Mr. Barrett?’ he asked.

‘Yes.’

‘ Well, he’s up there ; so I’ll take that too.’

‘ Why, Israel, I don’t know what’s the matter, but he came to me quite excited-like, the other day, when you took his letters for him, and almost swore they had been opened.’

‘ Guilty conscience, Owen. Do you think I’d do that ? ’

‘ No.’

‘ The Squire would like to see him have that letter without delay.’

‘ Well, Israel, he didn’t directly order me not to give them to you, so we’ll try once more.’

The postman gave the letters, glad to escape a toilsome walk, and Israel resumed his former pace.

One moment only he stopped. It was to eye the letter carefully all over. It was from the same correspondent who had so frequently written of late to the manager.

Israel knew that, for he had studied Mr. Barrett’s letters very carefully of late. The postmark indicated a place that was a perfect maze of collieries. Israel had heard nothing—read nothing—about Barrett’s private affairs ; but he

had watched him closely, and come to the conclusion that the manager was seeking a new and possibly more profitable post ; or else—and that thought struck Israel in a specially sinister point of view—he knew the dangers and future discredits of the mine, and was intending to retire safely before the day of that deluge which Jehoshaphat, with almost cynical enjoyment, had anticipated.

‘ There’s a look about the writing of this address I like,’ muttered Israel. ‘ It means decision.

‘ But then is it Yes, or No ?

‘ I’m a fool to ask that, or to care about it. Yes or No matters little ; but will the affair get to the knowledge of the squire ? That’s the question.’

He neither knocked nor rang when he reached the Farm, but went in where he knew there would be an open door. He met a servant, but the only cognizance he took of the fact was to ask her, under his breath—

‘ Has Mr. Barrett gone in to the Squire ? ’

‘ O yes, directly he came.’

‘ Somebody will bring me a roll of paper pre-

sently. Let me have it—'tis for the squire—the instant it comes.'

'Very well.'

'Just tap, and leave it against the door. I shall hear.'

Passing her without further word, he knocked softly at the door, and receiving no answer, as he expected none, went in.

His first act was to stand and look about him; his second, to take off his hat, which he had hitherto forgotten.

Griffith Williams was in his usual place, the chair of state, holding up with both hands a plan of some part of the mine; while the manager was leaning over him, and pointing out with his finger certain portions of it concerning which they were talking.

'Israel back again? That's lucky. Sit down.'

Israel did so, and the conversation went on for some time without seeming to interest him. Suddenly his posture changed.

'Then,' the Squire was saying, 'apart from minor operations and reparations generally through

the mine, levels number one, number five, and number six, are the only ones about which we need be anxious, or incur heavy expense for "dead work."

'That's correct, sir,' said Mr. Barrett.

'And the new district you have just opened out, and which promises to be so productive—are you quite sure that will involve no great demand on capital?'

'Quite, sir,' responded Mr. Barrett.

'Only a new shaft!' said Israel from his corner, in a deep sepulchral voice.

Now as a new shaft is in ordinary circumstances about one of the most costly operations the mining engineer can engage in, it is no wonder that the remark disturbed Griffith Williams's luxurious equanimity.

'What does he mean by that?' he asked of the Manager.

'Can't say, I'm sure. I only know that the ventilation is excellent at present, with the down-cast and upcast in one and the same shaft.'

Again came forth the sepulchral voice—

‘One shaft won’t do for the new district. And if it would, Parliament wouldn’t let it. Why, they say the bill’s passing now.’

Griffith looked from Israel to Barrett, and back from Barrett to Israel, and could not doubt, the one had been making things pleasant, the other was making them true.

He began from that moment to watch the two men closely, while continuing the conversation.

‘As to these levels, numbers one, five, and six, if we do not put them in a thorough state, is it certain that we can go on winning coal from them for a considerable period?’

‘Oh, quite.’

‘Not in number six,’ again asserted the sepulchral voice from the far corner of the room.

‘Why?’ asked his employer.

‘Because folk have been before us there.’

‘Nothing of the kind, Mr. Griffith, I assure you,’ said the Manager; ignoring, as he had done throughout, Mort’s presence, except when compelled to reply to him.

‘Look in your map, Mr. Barrett,’ said Israel.

‘I is you, Israel,’ said Griffith, ‘who must look

there. Get up, and come here, where we can speak to you without shouting.'

Israel rose and walked slowly to the table, and looked over the shoulder of the Manager, who had leaned down to inspect the plan.

'All right, ain't it, Mr. Barrett? You find the old works there—a little beyond the face of level number six?'

'Pray look again, Mr. Griffith, for yourself a moment,' appealed the Manager, half in scorn, yet half in trepidation, for Israel's manner suggested he knew not what cause of fear.

'I do look, and see nothing indicated but a most valuable field of coal. Stoop, Israel; here, over my arm. Don't be afraid.'

'I never was yet, sir.' Then, after a pause, he added, seeing his employer's heightened colour: 'Fear don't do for an Overman, sir.'

'True,' said Griffith, appeased. 'Well, do you find any abandoned works there, beyond the face of level number six?'

'I'm obligated to say no; and it ain't a pleasant thing to say.'

'Why, Israel?'

‘Because it ought to be there.’

‘Prove that, and ——;’ the impulsive man stopped in time.

Israel took no advantage—seemed to see none that could be taken. He walked slowly and heavily across the room, more slowly even than was usual with him. He enjoyed for once in his life the position of chief actor in a little drama, which might turn out only a miserable wretched farce—involving, however, quite enough of tragedy to give it dignity to him—or might prove a pleasant, agreeable comedy, with a most satisfactory *dénouement* of commercial sentiment.

It was to the door he went, to fetch his roll. He knew it was there—he had heard the tap outside. He went, and returned with it.

Slowly he untied the red tape, and placed it methodically on the table; slowly unrolled the bundle, which consisted of various papers; took one away from the rest, and placed it aside while he re-rolled the others; and then, and then only, did he display to the astonished eyes of the two men an entire plan of the mine, of the rudest description of manufacture, vilely coloured, black-

ened with the stains from colliers' hands, greased with drops from colliers' candles ; but still a plan that was vividly, staringly intelligible in every detail, and showing, at the first glance of the instructed eyes that now looked upon them, most important differences between it and the official plan of Mr. Barrett, which still lay there under the hand of his employer.

‘ Who made this ? ’ was that gentleman’s immediate enquiry.

‘ I did.’

‘ How, when, and where, in the name of heaven, could you accomplish this if you did not take it from other maps ? ’

‘ Actual survey, sir ; actual survey ! ’

‘ Indeed ! And you were able to make such a survey alone—with no help from others ? ’

‘ It looks like it, sir ; don’t it ? Hard work, and uncommon difficult. I was more often wrong than right when I began ; and so I found when I had to put my calculations together and make ’em agree. I ought to ha’ known better. It was the iron in the mine that put me out. And I had to take up the tramway, a bit at a time, as oppor-

tunity offered ; or when I couldn't do that, I had to get the rails covered with straw, and then, again, upon the straw I had to put a tidy layer o' small coal. You see, sir, iron and the magnetics plays the deuce with the compass. They won't work together in harmony nohow—not in surveyin'.'

'And at what times was all this done?' asked Griffith, in undisguised admiration.

'Not in my employer's time ; be sure o' that, sir. I always worked at night ; my reg'lar occupations, as you know, belongin' to the day. Mr. Barrett can speak for himself as to whether or no I have been a careless or a diligent servant.'

Mr. Barrett was not able to complain, and was in no mood to compliment, so remained silent and sullen.

And then, perhaps for the first time in his life, was Israel's form seen to swell with pride, his swarthy face to glow with conscious self-satisfaction. After a pause he went on—

'I've been waiting more than twenty years for my time to come ; and this, and things like this, naterally became my best helps to patience.'

‘And have you studied everything about mines and mining in this thorough spirit?’

‘Try me, sir; or let Mr. Barrett take me in hand. I’m ready.’

Griffith smothered an inward laugh, as he said to the Manager—

‘Barrett, have you looked at his map?’

‘He doesn’t seem inclined to let me.’

This was not exactly correct. Israel, for reasons of his own, had rolled up a part of his plan, and placed the remainder between Barrett and Griffith. But the Manager, after a rapid glance at level number six, and the ground adjacent, which it was intended he should look at, put his hands upon the paper, and moved one of them against the rolled part, as if to unroll it for convenience. This Israel instantly stopped, with the remark—

‘Your map is yours, Mr. Barrett, and mine is mine. Let each crow upon his own dunghill.’

‘Well, how is it?’ asked Mr. Griffith Williams, after a significant pause.

‘I don’t believe in his plan.’

‘All right,’ said Israel: ‘to-morrow morning I’ll show the place where I once bored through,

and nearly got into a mess ; and if Mr. Barrett likes to have a swim without the necessity of learning the art, he has only to say the word.'

'You startle me, Israel ! Did you certainly leave all safe ?'

'That, too, you shall see to-morrow, sir. That level is the dryest in the mine, and has been for years.'

'Well, Barrett ?'

'Well, sir,' responded the Manager, 'he has been here much longer than I have. Of course, a manager who is more often out of the mine than in it, must depend upon his Overman, who is always there. But he deserves to be prosecuted for not giving proper information.'

'In my Overman's book,' said Israel, looking at the agent, and then at a little memorandum he took from his pocket, 'bearing on the fly-leaf my name, and the date of the year (which he named)—the book which I gave you on your own request, on account, as you said, of various valeyble memoranda in it—you will find entered, under Wednesday, April 14, the particulars of this very occurrence.'

‘I know of no such book. I never received it. It’s all nonsense!’ exclaimed Barrett, loudly and angrily.

‘Given to Mrs. Barrett,’ began Israel, reading monotonously, and with an air of utter indifference, from another book, the place ready marked with a card, ‘on the 1st of January, the year after, at the same time that she gave me five shillings, and said it was a Christmas-box from Mr. B., and remarked, with a laugh, she wondered which was the best Christmas-box of the two—the book or the money.’

‘If she took it, she never gave it me.’

‘Ah, indeed! she said, when I asked her afterwards, she had given it. Would the Squire like me to fetch her?’

The Squire waited to see if Mr. Barrett answered the question; but, noting his silence and confusion, did not think it necessary to say anything either.

And now Israel drew forth his letter.

‘The postman gave me this for you with the Squire’s letters,’ he said to Barrett.

The Manager snatched it from Israel’s hand, glanced at the writing, then at Israel’s face, which

met his own immovably; and then, with somewhat nervous fingers, thrust it, as he thought, into his pocket.

Israel's hand, with the letter which he had picked up, was thrust forth before him the next minute, and the circumstance, though slight, visibly increased the Manager's confusion.

'Don't stand on ceremony, Barrett, read your letter if you like, while Israel and I study the map,' said Mr. Williams.

Had Mr. Barrett really been sure that Israel was incapable of tampering with his letter, as he certainly was, he would have preferred to read it at home; but the thought that Israel, his deadly enemy as he now considered him, might know the contents, determined him to know them, too, without delay, critical as he believed they must be.

Should they be what he hoped, he might yet let both Israel and the foolish Squire know a bit of his mind.

He read, and his face paled. The long negotiations with the owners of a great colliery were at an end; something had disturbed them, perhaps his too exacting demands, and so the letter

was simply a brief, moderately polite, and rather curt note of rejection—unconditional, absolute.

Griffith could not fail to divine, by the aid Israel's attitude afforded, the nature of this letter, but was too much of the gentleman to even hint a question on the subject.

He was known to be generous, and Mr. Barrett seemed in these eventful moments to determine to play a bold part, and trust to his employer's generosity for success in it:—

‘Mr. Jehoshaphat and I did not get on very well together, and he did not fairly put me on my mettle as regards responsibility by giving me an equivalent of power. Hence many shortcomings on my part. I wished to leave him, and wrote to an eminent firm. We negotiated, but I should have at once put a stop to these negotiations when you, sir, became the owner, had I had any reason to rely on your favour. But this letter definitely ends my chances there. I am free and ready to devote myself to your service henceforward, and will promise you there shall be no lack of zeal, care, or discipline.’

Griffith looked undeniably pleased, and

altogether Israel's chances seemed hopelessly lost to all eyes but his own.

‘Do you wish to examine any other part of my map?’ he asked, while carefully avoiding to display anything but what they had previously seen.

‘Does—does it differ much in other respects?’ asked Mr. Griffith Williams.

‘This—that you have seen—is perhaps the least important of the differences. There are questions of future profit here as well as questions of future danger or loss.’

‘And *there* you think, Israel, *you* alone ought to make not only the explanations, but the use?’

‘Twenty years is a long time to wait; but I’m content now.’

‘Ha! how is that?’

‘Because you are a just man and an enlightened man, and can see that my time has come—honestly come.’

‘Upon my life, Israel, I cannot gainsay you. Mr. Barrett, I shall pay you the equivalent of a quarter’s notice, and both I and Mr. Israel Mort, my future manager, will gladly do our best to promote your interests. And, by the bye, Israel,

a day or two after the funeral is over, say this day week, expect me at the mine.'

'The world comes to him who waits.' These words had met Israel's eye while yet a comparatively young man. They had been to him as a sudden light in the darkness of his lot, which he felt to be an infinitely deeper darkness than any he had known in the mine. They clung to him until, through some strong law of mutual attraction between him and the truth they conveyed, they became a part of his daily life, his one article of faith that nothing could shake.

And he *had* waited with invincible patience, speaking to no one of what he was doing and expecting; moving on, alike without sympathy or counsel; never going out of his way to make weak, because premature, experiments for success; bearing his hard lot, not with gentleness or Christian fortitude certainly, nor with the charity that thinketh no evil, but bearing it with an unshrinking resolve, that lacked only noble motive to be heroic.

How is he feeling now, as he descends the hill,

full of the consciousness that his hour had come —had passed, and that he had been equal to it, had wrung out of it full payment, with interest, for all fortune's debt?

Does the heart, hardened by such long adversity, begin to thaw?

Is he moved, as he thinks of taking the news to that poor wife at home, whom he, more than his poverty, had so utterly crushed down?

Will David now see the gloom that is fast spreading over his boyish fancies, melt away, and leave the world what it was before, beautiful as youth's own dreams, full of promise as youth's own desires? Will he be spared the ordeal of the mine to-morrow morning?

CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID'S FIRST DAY IN THE MINE.

WHILE it was still dark, cold, and raw, David, who knew nothing of his father's change of fortune, was awakened to his great trial.

Israel had lain a heavy hand on him and shaken him; and the boy, who had been dreaming of wandering in naked innocence all night on the banks of a river with an angel, who told him at last she was called Nest, opened his eyes in such sweet trust and utter forgetfulness of what lay before him, that Israel himself was somewhat troubled to meet the change that must come as memory came, and the stupor of sleep passed away.

The yet unconscious eyes were swollen with last night's tears, in which the boy's soul had drifted to that sweet sleep, that harbour of for-

getfulness and peace, which children, however sorely their burdens press upon them, scarcely ever fail to reach.

David had reached it, and been welcomed and cherished in it like some ship resting at home on the last night before a perilous voyage.

And there, as has been said, sweet dreams had visited him, old childish joys that he had half forgotten pressed softly to his heart again, and without bringing the sense that they were taking their last leave.

He woke at his father's hard touch, full of love for all the world; and springing to his elbow smiled up sweetly in Israel's inexorable face.

'Now, my boy—up with you! No more miss-fires! The day has come when you are to be a man.'

Yes, it *had* come—the day and moment of the great change. The alternations of hope and fear were for him no more. The blow had fallen. From that moment the flower of David's childhood was crushed never to rise again. The bitterness of a too early manhood came upon him. The dew of his life's morning, which was sparkling in

his eyes when his father woke him, rolled down in two icy tears, and was gone for ever.

His teeth chattered ; he drew away his shoulder from under Israel's hand ; slipped from his little bed, and drew his clothes on him, and his misery with them—like a man indeed.

He descended the stairs, and found his mother blowing the fire. Not daring to glance towards him, she went on with her task.

She sickened with the fear of hearing suddenly the cry for help of those lips which might still be taking their life from her bosom—so did their least complaint thrill through it to her heart's core.

But all was silent, save Israel's heavy monotonous tread above, and the crackling of the sticks in the fire over which she was trying to boil the milk for this bitter breakfast.

At last, when she had succeeded, and was turning to pour it upon David's bread, she turned and saw him already dressed, sitting in his place, white as death, in his pit-garb.

Before she could shape her lips to say a few words to him—and while hesitating as to whether

she might kiss him without some new and dangerous outburst of feeling from one or both—Israel descended and joined David at the table.

From that moment she dared not speak. And David never looked at her. And so in silence they passed on to the moment when Israel rose, and said,—

‘Now David, we must start!’

Then, as she saw the boy rise and take his cap, and stand by the door waiting, she could bear her anguish no longer, but went to him, and drew him to her bosom, and kissed him.

He was as cold as frost. He did not return her kisses, but his great blue eyes looked at her in passive acknowledgment of her love and helplessness.

As the pair reached the pit-mouth they found themselves among a great crowd of roystering, half-civilised boys, youths, and young men, with a very moderate sprinkling of older colliers—all waiting their turns to go down in the cage, which was kept in rapid and incessant motion.

Some were drying their damp clothes by the blazing fire; some roasting potatoes; some

smoking; and as any left their places at the call to go down, the vacancies were instantly filled by new comers.

It so happened that David was left standing alone by the pit-mouth while his father went into the little grimy office to hear the news of the night from the night-deputy Rees Thomas, and to arrange with some of the colliers about their work for the day.

Then, standing alone by the pit-mouth, David felt a kind of horrible fascination come over him in watching the cage, full of crouching, grimy men and boys, glide down—down—down—into that narrow, yet awful, abyss; which James Lusty, the day deputy, who spoke to him cheerily from time to time, told him was fifty times deeper than the height of the tallest ship's mast.

And then to see the empty cage glide swiftly up again, and fit for a moment so smoothly and noiselessly into its place, filling the entire aperture, blotting out that hideous other world below, as David would have liked to have seen the mine itself blotted out from all creation, but concealing it for a moment only; and then the in-rush of

another grimy mass of living beings, immediately followed by the sharp sounds of the signal-hammer—by the rush and roar and feverish gasps of the breathless engine—panting as if in a deadly race, and then its slackening pace and gradual quietude, as the cage was nearing the bottom.

The sounds of the voices and laughter of the colliers thrilled through the boy's soul, and strangely excited his fancy; they were at first so loud, and clear, and brimming over with vigorous life, and then so hollow, faint, and sepulchral, till there could only be heard a mere murmur, the last faint breath, so it seemed, of dying humanity, ceasing the useless struggle with fate, and sinking into—What? There the boy's imagination refuses to go farther, but stops with the instinctive feeling it would be wisest so to do.

Suddenly he hears his father's voice speaking to James Lusty.

‘David'll want a couple of candles to light him in and out of the pit.’

‘Ay,’ said Lusty. ‘But mightn't Master David have a lamp to keep burning?’

‘Let him have what others have—neither more

nor less. Take that once for all. And as to Master David, no more of that nonsense ; I'm the only master here.'

'Ahl right, master!' said Lusty, who still retained just a touch of his northern dialect. Squeezing the hand of David, as he stood between the two, he hung a pair of thin, wretched-looking candles, like a ghastly necklace, round the boy's neck.

Israel, Lusty, and David went down together in the lowest compartment of the cage. David raised nor hand, nor voice, nor glance in resistance to anything he was told to do. When his father said, 'Go in, David,' he went in. When his father told him to stoop he stooped, and then found Lusty's arm encircling him, and Lusty's ugly and grimy, but not unkind face close to his, bent most uncomfortably down, and twisted half-way round through the efforts of the owner to accommodate his height and bulk to the limited space afforded, and to the service of David.

Israel said nothing to his son in the descent ; not from want of feeling, but from a true instinct that nothing he could say would be likely to do

any good ; and he was, therefore, according to his wont, silent.

Perhaps it would have been as well if Lusty had followed his superior's example. But he was full of sympathy with the pale, timid, scholarly lad, and he could think of no other way of showing it than by talking of the mine, and of those features of it which Lusty always found so interesting to strangers, and about which his own sensitiveness, if he ever had any, had long passed away.

So with a sort of quiet glee he whispered to David about these funny ' forrin ' chaps—the Belgians—who called the shaft the grave ; and then putting into David's mouth the query, Why ? answered by characteristically brief narratives (for Lusty couldn't talk much, but blurted out at once whatever he had got to say) about accidents and adventures he and his comrades had experienced in going up and down shafts—ending by a most exciting account of a fight between two colliers while descending in a bucket, which story was stopped short by the arrival of the cage at the bottom, and by Israel's stern and dry command to Lusty to hurry away to where a shot had to be

fired. The story was stopped short and never completed, for David when he again met his friend had supped full of horrors, and had no heart to ask for the conclusion, and was only wishing he could tell Lusty without offending him how very far from amusing he found such talk.

Meantime the deputy thought it but common humanity to do his best to make the lad forget his own particular troubles; and seeing him gaze with pallid, wonder-stricken eyes on the deep, dark pool of water just at the bottom of the shaft, could not help stopping for a moment to explain that that was the sump, or pit, into which all the water of the mine drained; and that presently he would see the great spears of the pump—those enormous beams of timber, hanging in endless succession from top to bottom of the shaft—begin to work up and down to carry all the water away; and he finished off by warning David to be careful, for a very nice gentleman had been drowned there only a few weeks ago.

The boy's soul sunk within him. Every word he heard seemed but to confirm the ideas of danger with which he had come down. Still he

moved on by the side of his father and Lusty mechanically, now staring at the dead blackness of the walls and roof, now at the faint gleams of light from the lamps reflected back from the surface of the water through which he was wading, stumbling at every few yards, and helped up again by Lusty, who would cry, forgetting, perhaps wilfully, Israel's recent injunction—

‘Ahl right, Master David! Up and at it again, as the Dook said at Waterloo;’ or ‘The mine’s a bit rough, Master David, at first, but will improve on acquaintance;’ or, again, ‘Eh—what—Master David?—larning ahl the mine’s tricks at once, so as the better to circumvent ’un by and bye?’

The lad heard with his ears, but had no more actual comprehension of the meaning of the words than he had of the meaning of those mysterious sounds produced by the ventilating apparatus, which ever and again alarmed him with vague fears of some imminent catastrophe. Perhaps that was the awful Gas, of which he had heard so much, as a kind of invisible monster that would be quiet in mines for months and years together, and then

break out in flame and fury, and destroy everybody and everything within reach.

Not but what he struggled to cast off the paralysing spell that hung over him, and seemed to take away all impulsive individuality of life. As they passed on to where the colliers were at work, swarming like black bees in a black hive, David thought he would surely recognise some of them, and that then he would feel easier, and be able to talk ; but the very bustle of the multitudinous industry of the place, the ceaseless passage of long trains of loaded trams, the shouts of the drivers of the horses, the hurried way in which he was pushed suddenly into a little refuge hole, that barely allowed him space to guard his limbs from the dark mass thundering past, tended to confuse his mind, to exaggerate his every fear, to make the whole place at once as chaotic and incomprehensible as it was terrible to him.

And his experiences, when he did succeed in breaking for a moment the spell that paralysed him, were not very encouraging to further attempts in the same way. As they were passing a stall, that opened on their right, David saw a

shovel stuck with the handle in the ground, in the very centre of the opening, and he noticed there was a big cross chalked upon it.

‘Please, what is that for?’ he timidly asked Lusty; who, delighted to find the boy recovering himself at last, and seeing Israel as usual in advance, and giving directions to some men who were opening a drift-way into a new district, he stopped and said,—

‘Ah, now, that’s right! If you only begin to take notice, it’s wonderful how interested you’ll be after awhile. That spade is a danger signal.’

‘Danger signal,’ faltered the boy.

‘Yes,’ said Lusty; ‘if the night deputy finds the gas bad in a place where men are to work in the day, he sticks a warning across the entrance, a spade as you see upside down, or a couple of sticks placed crosswise, or aught else that comes easy to hand; which is as much as to say to the colliers, when they come to work, “Don’t you go in here, my boys, or it’ll be worse for you.” But mind you, sometimes it’s only a hint to be careful, without stopping the work. “Ahlways keep the work going, Master David, if it be in any way

possible ; ” that’s what the Owner says to the Manager, and the Manager to the Overman, and the Overman to the Deputy, and the Deputy to ahl the folk under him. And now, Master David, having done my dooty in teaching you that lesson, suppose we go on.’

They went on, and for some time alone, for Israel was called away ; and he had previously given a hint to Lusty that one or other of them was to be with David, till he had fairly made acquaintance with the mine and been set to work.

Noticing the damp on the walls in certain parts, and not on others, David again ventured timidly to put a question as to the reason, having, if truth must be told, overheard accidentally a few words between two colliers, as they passed him, which suggested quite other ideas than those of mere scientific or utilitarian curiosity.

‘ Well,’ said Lusty, taking advantage of the exceptional height of the place where they happened to be to draw his form erectly up, and enjoy a good stretch, ‘ that’s a point of ventilation, you see. The air as comes into a mine leaves

the walls dry, but that as goes out makes ahl this moisture.'

'Oh,' ejaculated David, with an unmistakeable tone of relief.

'Well now, what did you fancy about it, Master David?' asked Lusty, with some curiosity, as he held up his lamp to look at the boy's face.

'I—I thought I heard a man say there was a deal of water about, and that he shouldn't wonder if the sea some day didn't break in.'

'I'd like to let a good cudgel break into that fellow's head; but come along, Master David,^r and I'll show you something.'

They went on, David resisting with difficulty a great desire to say he didn't just then want to see anything he wasn't obliged to see.

Presently they stopped, and Lusty asked an odd question.

'Do you happen to know, Master David, when's high tide to-day?'

The lad's heart misgave him again about what he had heard the man say, and instinctively his eyes and hands went to the walls.

‘Dry as a bone, boy—dry as a bone. Feel! Don’t you find them so?’

‘Yes,’ said David, confused and ashamed that he had let his fear be so obvious.

Trying to push that thought away, he strove to answer Lusty’s previous question:—

‘It was high tide about six o’clock yesterday evening, I—I believe.’

‘Then it’s high tide now,’ said the deputy. ‘Look about you—touch the roof—you have felt the walls; could there be a more cosy, comfortable place, Master David? I mean as mines go, you know.’

David was fain to confess the place looked dry but, for all that, it was evident he already saw no end of horrors about it, for he knew well Lusty was going to startle him once more.

‘Well, Master David, if your mine larning were to go no further, you can say what’ll make folk stare ahl through your life—that you have been under the sea.’

‘Under the sea!’ faltered David.

‘That you have walked about there, and chatted

with an old friend, and weren't a bit obligated to hurry away before you chose to go.'

'Yes, yes, but please we'd better go. Father will be looking for us.'

'Listen, Master David ; can you hear anything ?'

Master David showed little inclination to listen with the requisite degree of attention and intensity of silence ; but, for all that, if his face might be taken as an index, he heard enough and too much. Again he wanted to hurry away, but Lusty insisted on his making the effort demanded ; and at last he was constrained to acknowledge once more in effect his silly cowardice, by owning, after fancying he heard many things, that he really heard nothing at all.

'Ah !' said the deputy, ' your young senses is a deal quicker than mine, and I thought you might now hear, as I have often heerd, the big waves a breaking on the shore above us, and have heerd 'em comin' in and goin' out, and what's most extor'nary, Master David—and I do think that strange—there ain't a many feet between us now and the salt water.'

' You don't work here now ? ' gasped David.

‘No, but we did, till we got ahl the coal out. Ah, Master David, I’ve had some awkward hours here. I mind well one day a collier came to fetch me, saying the sea was so uproarious they could’nt stand it any longer. So I went to judge for myself. The noise was tremendous—awful; so I thought it best to take the hands away a bit; but next morning they went at it again, and ever since, the sea, as if put on its good behaviour by that unnecessary stopping of so many folks’ industry, and as if ashamed of the figure it might cut in our annual statistics, has never once given me the least occasion to find fault. And mind, it’s something, Master David, when a deputy says that.’

‘Yes, but please, oh do please come away,’ gasped David.

‘I’m coming! I’m coming. Do you know, Master David, I’ve heerd some mines goes as much as three miles straight out under the sea.’

‘Yes, but mayn’t we go now?’

‘Think o’ lying down and smoking your pipe, with ships in full sail sweeping along over your head.’

‘Please do come.’

‘To be sure. Fahls, Master David, is bad, and explosions don’t bear a good character ; but, by the lord, inundations bangs ahl. Why there was that mine at Workington, a most valleyable one, settled a’most in no time. You looked, and there was the mine ahl in working order, full of folk, and producin’ no end of coal ; and again you looked, and the mine was gone, was every bit on it under water. And there it lies now, done for, for evermore. No engines ’ll ever be found to drain that mine. The job’s a deal too big.

‘Now, if this mine were to be caught one day in the same fashion, and it’s quite possible, we’d soon have it ahl right again. Why, Master David, what’s the matter, you look quite scared. I’m sure I’m doing my best to hearten you up a bit. Come, come, lad, pluck up courage. Courage, Master David, courage ; there’s no getting on in the world without that.’

So David thought too, and heartily wished he were out of the world, for a coward he knew he was, and a coward he feared he should ever remain.

Presently, in their onward course, the boy's soul was again appalled by the unearthly sounds he heard. It could not be the sea, for they were no longer under it; and yet David fancied no storm he had ever known raging on his native coast was more wildly tempestuous.

As they approached a canvas-covered door, the sounds increased so much in violence, that David in his fright could not even try to discover whether the form he saw dimly crouching in the corner by its side was one of his old school comrades or no.

It was no longer the simply grand sound of a stormy but distant sea he seemed to hear, but that of a sea in its fury, striving with repeated blows to overwhelm and destroy whatever might lie in its way.

Every instant the boy looked to see the door before him burst in with those mad spasms of overwhelming rage.

He could not speak, but looked all his anguish up in the face of the deputy, who once more tried his hand at comforting, and with somewhat better success than before.

‘Do you hear the mine, Master David, how it sings?’

‘Sings!’ gasped the boy.

‘Ay, to be sure, and such songs are more welcome to the miner when in the mine than the songs of ahl the throstles, and larks, and blackbirds that were ever born or bred in our bonny England! Their warblings tickle the ear a bit, and there’s an end, but yon singing keeps us ahl alive, keeps us ahl in breath, so that we can do some singing for ourselves, when we’ve a mind to, at our leisure.’

‘But what—is—it—then?’ asked David, feeling his confidence revive a little, in spite of the strangeness of the explanation.

‘Only the ventilatin’ apparatus at work; that big fan you seed in one of the houses above ground, thirty feet in diameter, and revolving in a second’s time, and so despatching every bit of air it finds near,—a sort of levy on mass as the forenners calls it you know, to drive out ahl other and worse airs it can find in the mine, and leave the bettermost behind, singing like a million of feathered creatures over its victory, till itself, like

human natur' begins to spile, and turn bad, and gets drove out generally in turn.'

'And is it—is it always so violent as this?' asked David, whose fears again were returning with the curiously intermittent rage of the wind-blows.

'Violent, Master David,' said the deputy with a grin, and evidently conscious of a forthcoming joke; 'you must be a jesting.' So saying he opened the fearful door; and no change ever wrought by an enchanter, could seem more miraculous to the boy than the one wrought now. Not a sound was to be heard; in one instant the raging tumults were hushed and gone, and the whole mine seemed buried in a repose that might not apparently have been broken for years.

Lusty roared as he saw the wonder in David's face, which brightened amazingly, and began to wreath itself in smiles, when lo! the door was again closed, and all the roar began once more, awful as ever to the boy's stricken imagination.

'Oh, please, Mr. Lusty,' he said, 'do let us get to father.'

They moved away, and for some time in deep silence; the deputy troubled that he could not get on better with the lad, and the lad sick to the soul with shame at what he knew Lusty must think and probably would say about him, but too much engrossed by the endless pitfalls and dangers in which he had to move to do more than strive to get away from them all as fast as possible.

Not the faintest ray of light entered still into the brain of the deputy, as to the true nature of the comfort he instilled with such admirable industry and devotion; and then, while he literally sweated with the unwonted intellectual exertions he made to 'brighten the boy up a bit,' he began again after a long pause with the remark—

'This is a queer thing we're coming to, Master David.'

'Is it?' responded the boy gloomily.

'You see we can't pass here, except on our hands and knees. Well, ten days ago, you might ha' stood upright at the same spot, though I couldn't.'

'What—what—is it then?' asked David, and

in very much the same sort of tone with which one of the tragic heroines of the antique drama might, when marked out by destiny for ceaseless misfortune, and while still throbbing with the pangs of the last calamity, ask, 'What next?'

'Oh, it's only the swellin' up o' the floor of the mine; it's a bit soft here, you see, and the roof's a trifle too heavy, and no wonder! We shouldn't like, Master David, to carry half a mile or so of rocks and coal on our backs—leastwise, we shouldn't like to do it long. And the mine feels that, and is hurt like at our puttin' so much on its shoulders. So the pillars o' coal which bear up the burden begin to press through the floor, and, so to say, right into its very body, until its flesh protrudes just like a piece of proud human flesh, and pushes us off, and shuts us up closer and closer, as if it'd like, if it knew how, to get rid of us ahltogether. We call it the creep, or crush.'

Poor David needed no further explanation. That word 'creep' was enough. Every nerve and sensation in his body seemed to thrill and quiver, and creep too, in more than sympathetic response.

Oh, when would the day be over, and he back again home, in his mother's arms?

That thought coming suddenly upon him made him burst into a wild passion of tears, which he managed, under the shelter of the darkness, to conceal from Lusty.

His new fear, however, quickened his sensations in one particular direction, and feeling his breathing impeded, while there was no perceptible breeze passing, as he had everywhere felt before, his eager fancy suggested a new alarm, that they were going into the innermost depths of the mine, where the air could not reach them, and where the 'gas' might be.

'Are we—going much farther in?' he faltered, after much deliberation to choose his words, so as to conceal the essence of his thoughts.

'No, Master David, we've just reached the place where we are to meet your father, and close by is the spot where he means to set you at work.'

He was to go to work then! And now! Was to stay there after enduring all this!

Vaguely he had begun to hope the intention might be to show him the mine—get him used

to it—and then let him out, so that he might try and pluck up courage to go a step farther on the morrow. That silly and cowardly dream was ended. He was presently to go to work, and with all these fearful thoughts in his mind that Lusty had instilled as his only companions.

The deputy now began to snuff the air with his nose, and peer about, and look at his lamp, and do something or other to it, which David could not understand.

But soon he saw the light in the lamp go down under Lusty's manipulations, down—down—down, till it got to a mere point.

The deputy then cautiously went a little apart from David, towards the opening to a natural recess, a kind of gigantic man-hole, before which hung a loose curtain. He knelt down, and slowly thrust the lamp forward, and David saw, with a shudder, there was a sudden elongation of the flame with a bluish tinge, and then a moment after, as the deputy lifted the lamp higher, there was an explosion, but inside the lamp only, and therefore as harmless in consequence as it was faint and insignificant in sound.

‘A touch of gas here,’ said Lusty, ‘but we’ll soon get rid of it, as I’ve done of old times in this very spot many a time afore. The way I’m going to show you, for the fun of the thing, ain’t permitted now. But you won’t tell tales out o’ school, Master David, will you?’

‘No,’ said David, in silent anguish.

The deputy, on account of the oppressive heat in those parts of the mine through which they had lately passed, had taken off a thick heavy overcoat. He put this down while he lighted a candle, and mounted it upon a flat piece of timber, so that it might travel with the timber without upsetting. He next attached to this strange apparatus a string; and so prepared, and drawing his overcoat across his head, face, and shoulders, he crept into the place where the gas was, David looking on with all the fascination a bird may feel while conscious of impending destruction.

He had previously told David there was a hole in the ground inside in which he should take shelter, but that he, David, need not be frightened, it would only be a puff and a flame, a bit stronger

and noisier, and brighter, than the one he had seen burst in the lamp, and that would be all: so saying, he went in, dropping the curtain carefully after him, on which David, while removing as far off as he could, fixed his eyes.

Lusty got into his hole, drew some loose boards around and partly over him, closed in his face and head with the overcoat, till he could only just see through a small aperture the lighted candle outside, then pulled away very slowly at his cord.

David saw the lighted candle begin its march, rather stately at first, then jumping and oscillating as it met obstacles, till it disappeared under the curtain.

He held his breath in suspense as to what was to happen now, but he bore pretty well the shock of the explosion, and the flame which burst through the opening of the curtain, but did no damage whatever.

Very proud was the deputy of the lesson in manhood he thought he had thus silyly given to his master's son, and which under any other aspect he knew he ought to be ashamed of, as against orders, and as setting an example to the men, if

it happened to become known, that would be most mischievous.

‘It’s only the “Rider,”’ he said to David when he returned, and the ‘Rider’ was then explained to be a thin vein of coal, which, if accidentally exposed, as this had been, gives off a good deal of gas.

At that moment Israel joined them.

‘Now, David,’ he said abruptly, and turned to lead the way.

The boy followed, feeling the time was come at last when he was to be placed in actual contact with that labour of the mine he had so long shrunk from in fear, and which the experiences of the morning made a thousand times more appalling to him than ever.

Presently Israel stopped, as in reflection, turned, and called in a loud, clear voice to Lusty—

‘Jem, there’s a shot to be fired in Morgan’s stall. Look to it yourself, to keep all safe.’

‘Ay, ay! sir,’ responded Lusty, using for the first time a new mark of respect for his employer, and dividing for ever the comrade-like connection that had so long existed between them.

Passing a stall where colliers were actively at work cutting coal, Israel again stopped for a moment, and said to David,—

‘Wait here. Don’t move, mind, or you may lose yourself. I shall be back presently.’

‘But, father, mayn’t I go with you?’

‘Come then.’

They went into the stall and followed its devious course till they got to the face of the coal where the heat was simply overpowering, and the space so confined that every portion of the work had to be done under great physical difficulty.

Here one collier knelt; another next him had the luxury of being able to sit; a third lay on his side; while others were prostrate on their backs, all nearly naked, all hewing away, all bathed in copious streams of perspiration.

After giving some directions to one of the colliers, Israel called David away, and went back to the level out of which they had branched, and resumed their former course.

Presently they came to a door, but instead of Israel’s opening it, or calling to the dark figure sitting in the deep gloom by its side to open it

for him, he stopped before that dark figure, and holding forth his lamp the better to see the youthful but preternaturally aged face that looked up to meet his, said—

‘Willis, is that you?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘How’s the ventilation?’

‘It’s been very violent, and then it stopped all of a sudden, hardly a mouthful of wind to be got anyhow.’

‘It’s violent enough now. I must see to it. We’re a long way from the fan, and a difficult way to reach besides. How old are you?’

‘Fourteen next St. David’s Day.’

‘And how is it you’ve found nothing better to do than opening doors at that age? Idle and careless, I suppose? Content to be whatever gives you the least trouble to think about?’

‘I didn’t want to be discharged by axing for something better.’

‘Can you drive—pony or horse?’

‘I often do to help the others.’

‘Very well. David, my son, will now take your place. Stay with him a few minutes to see

that he quite understands his duty. Then go to Lusty and say you're to be moved a step upwards, both in work and wages.'

The joyous light glistening in Willis's eyes alone told how pleased he was, for he said nothing, but turned in a kind of boyish sympathy towards David, whose face he did not know, and was trying to make out.

'Now, David,' said Israel, in his usual harsh tone of command, 'sit down where Willis was sitting, take the cord into your hand, and remember your duty is not merely to open the door whenever the trams want to pass, but you must listen for their coming, so that there may be no delay. They are noisy enough. You can't fail to hear if you are only attending. Mind that, and mind that the door can't be too quickly shut the moment the trams are through. Quick to open, quick to shut, and there's the whole duty of a diminutive man, my boy, described for you in little. Do this well, and you'll go on soon to do other things well, and then to do all things well by and bye. Hark! Do you hear anything?'

David's confused senses made him fancy he did hear vaguely some distant-sounding shout ; so he thought the trams must be coming, and he ought to open the door. He pulled sharply and the door stood open. Israel as sharply cried,—

‘Shut the door! Pull the string, can't you? There was nothing coming; as you'd have known if your wits hadn't gone wool-gathering.’ Then he added,—‘Too soon David's as bad as too late. Well, no, too soon's a good fault. Willis will tell you how to hit just the right point of time. Now I leave you. At noon I shall bring you something to eat. Quick to open and not too quick; quick to shut and not too quick; or you'll have the doors smashed by the tram that has not passed through. That's all I've got to say. Mind it all well, and you'll have me here some day, not very far off, on the same sort of errand to you that brought me now to Willis.’

Israel went off, and perhaps for a space of five minutes the two lads, who were left in the most absolute darkness, scarcely spoke to each other. Willis was silent from respect to his master's son, and to David's scholarship, whilst David's soul was

too full to speak, if he could help it, to anybody. His heart throbbed and beat as if it would burst; his brain was seething in wild tumult; his hands and feet were cold; his limbs ached; his body was feverish; life, in a word, just then was, taken altogether, so painful and confusing a thing that the wretched lad felt as though there would be no happiness like the happiness to die and be at rest, if only his mother might hold him in her arms, and Nest be near to see how manfully he, the coward, could die.

Suddenly it struck David that perhaps Nest, who was in many things a peculiar girl, might fancy it would be much more manly to show how he could live.

Cogitating over that thought a little, he came to the conclusion that Nest's fancy was not quite so hopelessly silly as at first it seemed, and that he was, after all, inclined to try whether he really could do what his father wanted, and see whether that did make a man of him. Oh, if he could be that, he thought, he might endure even the mine for a few months, or perhaps a year or two.

‘Now then ! they’re coming,’ exclaimed Willis, as he nudged David’s arm.

David heard the train rattling noisily on, nigher and nigher, and, with hand nervously grasping the cord, waited for some signal to guide him as to the right moment.

He hears a shout, but it sounds too far off, he thinks, to be meant for him ; and while hesitating, he hears another, as unmistakable as it was uncomplimentary in its terms. He pulls the cord, the door barely opens in time, and a horse and driver at the head of some empty trams appears and passes ; and as they pass there comes a savage lash from the driver’s whip right across David’s head and face, and cutting so keenly into his cheek that David, with a cry of anger and pain, puts his hand to the place and feels the moist blood.

‘You’ll be quicker next time mayhap,’ shouted the driver, as he made his horse move quickly on and trotted away by his side.

‘He didn’t know,’ said Willis apologetically. ‘He thought it was only me. Never mind.

When you're a driver yourself, you can do the same to the little 'uns. I shall.'

'Not to me, I hope,' said David.

'Oh no! not if I know it. I shall tell that big bully who you are, and he'll want to lick your feet the next time he passes. I'd let him for the fun of the thing. He is such a beast. I mean to fight him when I'm four year older. A sovereign a side, and if you like you shall hold the stakes and see fair play.'

As David listened to Willis's voice in the darkness, and listened with a sense of comfort, his thoughts were again striving to realise what it was he would have to go through to satisfy his father. So he put a question to his companion, who said,—

'This is the first job we all have to take to, opening and shutting doors. The next is driving the pony or horse. After that you come to hitching the trams together and unhitching, and then there's only one more move to put you up to the top of the tree as a real working collier. But, mind you, cutting coal ain't a art to be

sneezed at ; you must begin under another collier, who teaches you how to cut coal in the knowingest ways, and at the same time, by taking the best part of your wages, teaches you summat else, which you larns others in due course, of course.'

The lads laughed over this jest, shook hands, and Willis departed to seek his new post.

Again David thought, as he found himself alone, he would resolutely strive to master all the absurd fancies and fears that so unsettled him, and try to pass his life in the mine as quietly as he saw Willis did. He felt ashamed indeed as he reflected how little incentive Willis had to play his part in life in a manly fashion, and how much he, David, had. The one had to learn all, and endure all, and then have nothing to hope for beyond ; while the other had to learn and endure, merely that he might the better grasp the infinite things that lay beyond. Where the one's higher life ended the other's was to begin.

Insensibly his blood became calmer, his thoughts clearer, his fears less ready to rush upon him with a thousand new and horrible suggestions of fires and water and explosions, and falling roofs ; of

life-long deformities of limb or feature ; of ghosts, and all the other terrible creations of a quick-witted boy's vivid fancy.

He almost wished his father would come that he might speak to him, and say he was now going to begin in truth the business of man-making.

He longed for something to do to attest his new courage, and show Jim Lusty that there was good stuff in him after all. This sitting hour after hour to pull a string was such cold-blooded work, that no boy could grow strong in doing that !

Musing thus, his attention was drawn to something that appeared distant and quivering through the darkness. Soon he fancied it a light, but it was still so faint he could not be quite sure. But each minute it grew more definite and bright, and was no doubt approaching. Soon David heard voices, and at last he sees emerge from the gloom two figures, each carrying a lamp and some strange tools, which they set down only some twenty or thirty yards from where the boy was.

The promise of companionship was pleasant—their voices and laughs pleasant—and David felt

strangely cheered at the thought they were going to work so near him.

But what were they going to do? The tools seemed to be a heavy long-handled hammer and a kind of heavy solid spike.

Before beginning they opened their lamps, at which David wondered, as he knew well that naked lights were forbidden, and he did not know how loosely as yet all these recent rules for improvements were observed. A man would say to himself, he knew quite well there was no gas anywhere near him (which probably was correct), and at once proceeded to legislate for himself, so as to get as much light as possible for his work.

David was then able to see the whole process of their special labour, while unnoticed by them.

Stripping to their work, and one of the men retaining nothing but a pair of drawers, David saw the other take up the long heavy spike, and hold it horizontally with its point against the rock, guiding it with his hands, whilst the other with the hammer struck so powerful a blow on

the massive end of the rod that the breath of the striker came forth with it so loud and violent, that it almost seemed to David as if the man himself had been struck rather than the instrument for penetrating the rock. Again came the blow and the wheeze at brief intervals, till, perhaps, some twenty or thirty blows had been struck, when the man had to rest, exhausted, while the other pulled out the pin to see how far it had gone. A little more than three-quarters of an inch! That was all.

Somehow, the incident seemed to say to David it was intended for his benefit. He felt ashamed as he watched how unremitting and how good-humouredly the men went on with their arduous work, changing their tasks alternately, till they had got the pin as far in as they seemed to desire. But what could the hole be for?

He saw them now close their lamps carefully, and take from their pockets a little packet and a something narrow that seemed to hang, but did not seem to be cord or string. The packet and the pendant were with great precaution placed in the hole; and, it seemed to David, were both

forced in as far as possible, while leaving a good piece of the pendant hanging outside.

David's soul took fright in an instant. His first guess that something serious was about to be done, was confirmed as he saw one of the men move carefully away, while the other began to put a light to the pendant.

He would have cried to them, if only that they might know he was there; but he was suffering, in waking hours, one of those terrible effects which he had known before only in dreams. He felt he would give the world to speak, to move, but his limbs and his voice were alike paralysed by some inexplicable influence.

Suddenly he heard a loud cry of 'Fire!' from the men. He saw a brilliant flame darting along just where floor and wall join, and stop opposite him. In a minute it would explode he thought. He could bear no more. The new terror overpowered the old one. He rose to his feet, drew back the door of ventilation, and fled with the wild cry of a maniac—he knew not, cared not whither.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FUGITIVE.

WITHIN two or three hours it became known everywhere in the neighbourhood of the mine that David Mort, Israel's only son, had been lost in the recesses of the pit, and was supposed to have strayed into some abandoned working, from whence he could not extricate himself, and where in all probability he must have perished speedily from the foul state of the air.

Thus the news reached Mrs. Mort, who rushed frantically to the pit's mouth. Thus the news reached Israel, who had gone into the village, but who, as he went back at a steady pace with the messenger, sternly bade the latter to say nothing to anyone, but that the lad had missed his way, and would be found all right again at his work to-morrow. And thus the news reached, at a still

earlier hour, the night-deputy, Rees Thomas, who was in bed, and had just waked from his first sleep when his landlady came to tell him the news.

Within five minutes Rees Thomas was going at a swift pace towards what he feared was to be the grave of the poor boy ; and he was the first of the important outsiders to reach the pit.

He found Lusty in dreadful trouble. He and certain picked men had vainly ransacked every part that it was at all safe to go into, and he looked as if the case were a thoroughly hopeless one, and that he was chiefly dreading the meeting with Israel.

Taking all possible precautions for his safety, and for the power of enduring for a short time serious difficulties with the air, Rees Thomas simply said,

‘The lad is in the Lord’s hands. It is not as we will, but as He wills. If aught happens to me, remember me kindly to Israel, and ask him to befriend the young maiden whose name I have written here for his son’s sake.’

Then starting for the place where David had

been located for his work, and avoiding the ordinary level, he went from one old and abandoned stall to another, wherever they were not absolutely impervious to the entrance of a boy, till he came to one in which the road descended and passed through shallow water, and where the gas was so bad and dangerous that he felt sure Lusty and his companions had not tried to go through.

Going on all fours, so that he was nearly enveloped by the water, he entered into this valley of the shadow of death, keeping his mouth just above the water, where he knew would be the most air. But he had not advanced above a step or two across the hollow bottom of the declivity before he felt something, which brought with it the instantaneous conviction he had found the lost boy.

His hands told him he could not be mistaken, and his heart told him the lad was gone utterly, unless he had been able to breathe where he lay, which the darkness prevented Rees Thomas from attempting to judge of.

Almost fainting himself, he managed to drag

the helpless body back into the airy level, to look at it by the aid of his lamp, and then he became insensible.

It was, however, but for a few brief moments. He revived, prayed audibly, even while not delaying an instant to attempt to discover if the boy still lived.

‘Ah, yes! the heart beats. He will recover. Thy hand is in this, O Father of mercies! Thou hast said Thy servant Israel shalt yet truly serve Thee.’

Moistening the boy’s lips, and using such other gentle gestures as he remembered to be useful in cases of drowning, for he knew not whether the gas, or the water, or the simple fright had done the chief harm, he soon had the inexpressible happiness to see David’s great blue vacant-looking eyes open, then become filled with a sudden sense of terror awful to look on, and then recognise who it was that bent over him with looks of love. There was a smile, a sob, and a great rush of tears, while he found himself folded to the heart of the good deputy.

By this time Lusty and others had found them;

but Rees Thomas begged them to leave him alone with David for a little while, and he would bring him to the pit's mouth, if they would have all ready for him to ascend. Meanwhile he asked Lusty to go to Israel and his wife, and tell them the lad was safe and coming up.

Lusty went away, and Rees Thomas gave David something to drink which seemed to him quite as good as the nectar of the gods he had so often read about in his school, though he owned afterwards he knew quite well it was only weak tea.

He then ate a few morsels, and was so much better that, by taking the deputy's right arm, he could walk.

‘Do you know, Mr. Thomas,’ he said, when he was able to speak a little, ‘that I don't know how it was, but when I got to the water I felt so strange, and suddenly I seemed to see the sky and all the stars shining so brightly down upon me, and I thought I was in the wood, and then
——’

‘And then?’ kindly guessed the deputy.

‘No; I can't tell anything more. I saw the

stars, and then—oh! but it seemed such a time after—I saw your eyes, and I was so confused between them, as to which was which, that ——’

‘I understand, David. Forget it all, lad, now. It is but a little accident. We mustn’t make too much of such things. I want you to tell me about yourself, and this leaving school, and coming to the mine.’

The poor lad stared a moment at the speaker; it seemed so strange to be asked to relieve his over-burdened soul. Mother, father, everybody, whether pitying him or no, all alike seemed to think it wise to say little about the event to him, and manly in him to say nothing at all.

He revolted against that, and he had found a sympathising listener at last. Little by little Rees Thomas got him to converse freely, and so to tell him all he had been thinking, feeling, and suffering from, through his sudden withdrawal from the school, and the enforced work in the mine.

Rees Thomas listened with the deepest interest to the revelation, until quite moved out of him-

self David could no longer hide the one black cloud that obscured his whole mental world:—

‘Oh, Mr. Thomas! I am so afraid that—that
——,’

‘What, David? Be afraid of nothing but not telling the truth when it is a friend who listens.’

‘That I am a wretched coward, and that I shall never be fit for anything in the whole world.’

‘David, I don’t believe that.’

‘Oh, it is true! father says so. I didn’t know till he made me do this, and now—oh, I do so wish I was dead? Why did you come to me? I should never have had any more trouble if you hadn’t.’

‘David, lad, that is wicked talk, or would be if you were in a fit state to guide and judge yourself, but you are not. Come now, trust in me, if only for a little, and let me see if I can’t shape things a bit for you. But we have said enough for the present about these matters. I want to think them well over. But if I do, and work for you as a friend with all my heart, will you promise on your part to be patient and thoughtful?’

‘Oh, yes, I will; I will, indeed—if you think I’m worth caring for.’

‘Worth, my boy? Why it’s as much as the angels can do to calculate the worth of any human soul, even the most ordinary, if only the life that it is to lead be but in harmony with its capacities. But you, David, are, if I mistake not, not one of these merely, but unusually favoured by God. However, that we shall see. I am now going to try to show you the mine in a different aspect.’

Rees Thomas first took him to the stables where no less than forty horses were stalled at night. Some were then in their places, eating as heartily and looking as robust and full of enjoyable life as if the mine was the sole world into which they had been born.

Then they went to a pleasant cosy place near the bottom of the shaft, where many of the colliers were at the moment dining. They sat down with them, entered into conversation with them, and whether it was the influence the deputy exerted over David and them, or the really agreeable chit-chat and banter, mixed at

once with good sense and feeling, that characterised the meal in which David shared, the result was a strange and altogether new lightness of heart that came over the boy, and promptly influenced all his surroundings. He laughed, he jested, and might have grown uproarious, but that he happened to see some of the colliers exchanging significant glances of amusement, and he was at once sobered, and carried back to the grimness of fact.

Rees Thomas noted the change, and took him away by a long rambling gallery till they stopped at a great hole in the wall, a kind of big natural cupboard in an out-of-the-way corner, where the deputy had collected a number of pieces of stone coal, of different shapes, with their surface so beautifully polished, you seemed to see right into them.

David looked at one of these brilliantly reflecting surfaces by the aid of the lamp, and was charmed by the exquisite forms he saw there. Then Rees Thomas explained these were all fossils, found in the mine at different periods, and which by gift or purchase had become his.

He then told David the story of the origin of

coal, of the state of the world at the time, of the state more particularly of his own immediate neighbourhood, and of the things that then lived and grew, examples of which lay before them. All this became to David as one of the most ravishing fairy tales he had ever heard.

‘Is it true? Is it true?’ Such was his question, again and again repeated.

The instrument was tuned at last, and fit for any music that the deputy might have the skill to draw from it. He began in the gentlest way, and using the most simple language, to suggest to David that we can none of us shape the circumstances under which life must begin. We can neither choose our parents, our homes, nor our pecuniary positions; neither can we choose our friends or our future vocation—not, at least, till we begin to gather knowledge, strength, power to see things as they are, and power to so guide ourselves that we may gradually and safely put off the dependent child, and put on the independent man. Fortunate but few are those who can pass at once in boyhood to the preparation for the precise kind of life they desire in manhood to

live. Unhappy are those who have no choice either as boy or man, but must simply accept that which lies next, however unsuitable to their frames, their tastes, their special capabilities, or their natural desires. To the first belong the rich and favoured; to the last the bulk of the labourers here in the mine, as well as in a hundred other departments of industry.

‘Do you feel for these unfortunates?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes! Will they always be so?’

‘Ah, David! what if I were to say that your life itself may be one of many serious and most important answers to that question?’

‘Mine?’ exclaimed the boy, in undisguised astonishment, yet colouring deeply, as if vaguely conscious of what must be meant.

‘Do you belong to either of the two classes I have spoken of?’

‘Yes, ——’

‘Stop! consider well. Be just to your father, and fear not. Then answer.’

The boy became puzzled, confused; his countenance again began to darken.

‘Suppose now, David, let us only suppose it,

that God has given you powers that are intended for more than your own welfare and enjoyment, but accompanied it with an inexorable condition, that you shall discipline yourself for this service, and the service of your fellow-creatures, by a period of pain, by labours disgusting to you, by humiliations that you kick against, not so much for their own sake as because you believe them to be so unnecessary. Suppose all this, and one, two, three years even pass—longer I believe quite out of the question—would you not think at the end of that time you were well repaid if you had kept your own conscience clear, had conquered your own will, won your father's respect and help, and from that time had only science in all its exactitude, beauty, and beneficence to study, away from here, in London, meeting daily with men whose names burn like lights in the darkness of time. Ah, David, can you doubt, my dear boy, that after all your father is substantially right, that you must obey him, learn practically all he wants you to know, and then, too, you will have acquired by actual experience what experience alone can teach, to

understand these hard-working little-thought-of heroes of ours, who do, without repining, for others what others would not do for them. David, David, the mine is to you your initiation into a holy brotherhood, one in which some day your name shall be never heard but with kindly or grateful recollection.'

The lad's face showed how deeply his whole being was moved. Even where he did not quite understand all that was involved in the speaker's words, he still could sufficiently guess at his meaning.

'Here, David, is the whole thing for you in a nutshell. Tell me, had your father spoken to you as I have done, had he gone differently to work to attain the same end, don't you feel you would have been easy at once, and have forgotten all the horrors of the mine after an hour or two's acquaintance?'

'Yes—I think so—perhaps,' faltered David.

'Had I been your father, were I now Israel Mort thus appealing to you, could you hesitate? do you?'

The deputy paused, and the two gazed earn-

estly, longingly into each other's eyes, then suddenly with a voice broken with emotion, the lad threw himself into the deputy's arms, murmuring,

‘ Help me ! watch me ! and I will do all I can, all you say.’

‘ And all your father says ? ’

‘ Yes.’

And so the compact was sealed.

‘ Mind, David, what I am going to tell you. You don't know your father yet. I don't think anybody knows but God. Sometimes I fancy light has been vouchsafed to me, and that light, David, shows me Israel Mort as a true man, a strong man, a great man. At all events, be to him a son, heed not his harsh words, and time—I promise you *that* at all events, and in any case—will bring you a rich repayment.’

CHAPTER X.

'TWIXT CUP AND LIP.

'HAS Israel Mort come?' asked Mr. Griffith Williams impatiently, the day after the funeral, as he entered through the French window into the sitting-room with an open letter in his hand.

'No, indeed,' said his wife; who, in the very deepest of mourning habiliments, was just then whisking down an unfortunate spider from some dim and hitherto undiscovered crevice with her long feather-headed broom, and at once with her foot putting him out of his pain.

Griffith rang the bell impatiently, and when the maid-servant came bade her look out, and see if Israel was coming.

Then he began to read his letter again, but stopping short, he called out with just a touch

of annoyance in the tone, as if it were an old grievance—

‘Maggy, do stop that ceaseless bustle of spider-hunting, curtain-flapping, and rearranging everything. Such order becomes to me a kind of chaos made tidy;—do stop. Leave all that to your servants, and to fitting times; and sit down here, I have something to say to you.’

She paused a moment—just where she stood with the long feather brush raised high as she could reach to dust the centre ornament on the gilt cornice,—as if trying to understand him; but failing to do so, she completed her job, then sat down near him with a smile on her genial face, and holding the long wand-like handle of the broom stuck upright, like an Amazonian spear turned to domestic use.

He laughed as he saw her attitude, but said with a grave face—

‘Brother Jehoshaphat, it seems, was not content with astonishing people while he lived, but carefully provided a fund of amusement for them when he was dead. I have just received a letter by post from the solicitor of his wife, old Mrs. Jehoshaphat

Williams, to say that after the will made in my favour, as regards the mine, he left another, which has only just been discovered in a secret drawer, expressly referring to and maintaining the first, but saddling me with a charge on the mine in the old woman's favour to the tune of three thousand a year, she having already got all the rest of his property !'

'Griffith ! Griffith !'

'You may well exclaim. But I fear the matter is worse even than it looks, and that in the guise of a friendly gift my brother has deliberately conferred on me a most thankless labour and responsibility.'

'Dear, dear ! Yes, indeed ! Yes, indeed !' reiterated Mrs. Williams, with that rising inflection at the end of the sentence that is so characteristic of the Welsh, and so pretty in its women.

'Here,' continued her husband, 'just read the letter, and see if I have mistaken anything, for it has upset me greatly.'

The obedient wife puts down her weapon, and takes the letter, rather a long one for a lawyer's, as if Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams had had a finger

in the pie, in having so many details gone into. She puts her left hand determinedly to her forehead while holding out in her right the letter, at some distance, to read: but not long can she go on without interruption, for silence and bodily rest have already sent her mind's eye towards the many subjects that require her domestic care.

As it is her habit, whenever she sees or thinks of a bit of work to be done, to pounce upon it like a bird of prey, no matter how important the task may be that she leaves unfinished, how can she read such long letters, or follow such new and strange thoughts?

This propensity of hers for flying from task to task renders such times of domestic inactivity as the present moments of great care and agitation, for the ghosts of her unfinished works will rise up before her and torment her. Who then can wonder that she gives but a divided attention to Griffith's letter this morning, or to the reflections the letter excites in Griffith's mind, when such a motley and bewildering assemblage perplexes her brain.

‘The mine,’ he is saying, ‘I find, has been

producing about six thousand a year for some years past; so apparently there's three thousand a piece for us, and the burden of management upon me alone. Well; perhaps that's not unfair. But what do you say to this, Maggy? Israel Mort has been at Barrett repeatedly about the bad state of the mine, and the other day he came to me, even at the risk of Barrett's sending him adrift. And what do you think he said? Why that Jehoshaphat has so worked the mine—taking everything he could get out of it, and putting nothing he could help into it—that his motto must have been the same as that of the famous Prince Metternich—"After me the deluge!"

Seeing his wife's eyes already begin to wander, he rose and paced up and down the room, speaking now to himself, now to her, while her thoughts, however much she strives to detain them, are again far away. Now they penetrate below the crack in the floor, right down into the clean, darkish cellar; where, on a table, in their white cotton clothes, lie hams and flitches of bacon waiting to be salted, and ribs and loins and trotters to be wrapped up and sent to neighbours

who have bespoken them, or, in special cases, as gifts.

‘Don’t you see, Maggy, my position? I have all the repairs, however elaborate or costly, to make.’

‘Yes, indeed! It’s a shame, Griffith.’

‘So that if I have to spend the entire income for a year—a year, do I say? perhaps for many years—her three thousand must go on being paid!’

‘But Griffith, she can’t live long, you know. No, indeed.’

‘And then it may be worse—for it is not a mere life interest, but a permanent charge, which she can and will leave to others. She may be reasonable, and inclined to help; but a stranger will of course stick to his bargain, and ask me if I am a rogue if I propose to modify it.’

Mrs. Williams sees not only the truth and force of all this, but manages at the same time to see besides, that there is a tap half driven into a beer barrel:—that there is a dish of freshly-churned butter set down on the stones, within reach of the cat;—that there is a pan of heaving and crackling

.

dough at the kitchen fire :—The vivid imagination can bear no more. She rises hastily, says :—

‘Griffith, excuse me just a minute,’ and disappears, to return no more till her husband has, as usual, forgotten her absence, and found new avocations elsewhere. That was easy now. For Israel’s face appeared for a moment at the window, as he crossed and looked in, but was going on to enter more humbly by the door.

‘Come in here ! Come in !’ cried Griffith aloud. Israel pushed open the glass door and stepped in, greeted by the words,—

‘Have you heard the news?’

For a moment Israel did not look up. It was a way with him, that of looking on the ground, when pondering in thought, or when expecting critical questions.

Slowly at last he raised his head, and looking impassive as a piece of ice, said—

‘To what, sir, do you refer?’

‘My brother’s new will.’

‘Just discovered?’

‘Yes. Giving his wife three thousand a year as a charge on the mine.’

Israel's eyes again sought the ground, as if he could always at need there recruit his mental forces ; then turning them steadily on Griffith, he said :—

‘ Well, sir, I will tell you. I signed that will, I and a comrade brought by me, as witnesses, at Mr. Jehoshaphat's request, for he had rather a respect for me, even though he didn't choose to promote me.’

‘ You signed it ! you, Israel ! you astonish me ; and did he tell you what you were signing ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ And you did not remonstrate, not say one word of the monstrous injustice of saddling me with all the dangers, expenses, and responsibilities, while probably giving to her the bulk of all the earnings ?’

‘ How could I, Mr. Griffith ? I am but an Overman, as Mr. Jehoshaphat once was. But he had become a great man, I remained a little one, little and insignificant as when we first knew each other. It was for him to say, “ Israel, do this,” and for me to obey.’

‘ And why did you not tell me before ?’

‘Because he bade me hold my tongue till the lawyer had said his say.’

There is no need to pursue the dialogue. It ended once more to Israel’s advantage, and in an increased desire on Griffith’s part for the meeting in the mine, fixed for the morrow.

Meantime, Mrs. Williams’ first business was to discover what her ‘lazy, loitering lasses,’ the servants, were about; so she went round through the little court, with its old, picturesque, ivy-clad walls, that surrounded the kitchen and other offices, and began to call in a shrill voice for ‘Ruth’ and ‘Gwen,’ but called in vain; so hurried on to the kitchen door, prepared for any amount of domestic calamity.

At the threshold she was met by Nest in tears; and the moment the poor child saw her she ran to her and clasped her, and hid her face in her dress as if her heart would break with the distress that was too great for her to explain.

With some effort Mrs. Williams extracted the truth. Nest had just seen David—had met him

quite accidentally—and been so frightened at his looks and his hideous miner-dress, that she could not venture to speak to him. But then he had come after her, and told her all his dreadful story about his first day in the mine, and how kind to him Rees Thomas had been, and how he meant to try again.

‘I sat down and cried I can’t tell you how long. And then he seemed sorry he had told me, and said his father called him a mean coward, and he supposed he was one, or he should never have told me. And then he saw his father coming, and he went away, and never even wished me good-bye.’

Mrs. Williams loved her child and knew how to comfort her, and did so now, and brought back all her bright gaiety at last by explaining to her Israel’s improved position, and by promising to see what could be done for David’s future.

And then Nest prattled on, just like a bird in the early morning, as if it mattered nothing what was said, when the saying was so sweet, and then—

Why then Mrs. Williams, while reluctant to put away the child, sees once more in her excited fancy the beer spirting from the tap, the cat cooling her tongue in the fresh butter, the dough rising to unheard-of heights; she also sees in the same way Jenkyn, the farm servant, coming for his coat, from which she had cut a sleeve, and only half finished putting it in again; sees strange dogs prowling about the cellar where she has left her hams, and flitches, and ribs, and trotters unprotected.

At these and a host of other disturbing visions Mrs. Williams presses her feet together, kisses Nest, bids her run and play, and herself rushes off to examine into the actual state of things.

CHAPTER XI.

GRIFFITH WILLIAMS AND ISRAEL TAKE COUNSEL
TOGETHER IN THE MINE.

THE day of the appointment for a meeting in the mine having come, Mr. Griffith Williams dressed himself with some care, conscious of the eyes that were to look, many for the first time, on their new employer. He had forgotten for the moment the sort of place he was going through, and the contact his clothes would have to endure.

When Mrs. Williams reminded him of this at their very early breakfast, he said carelessly,—

‘Israel will see to all that, no doubt.’

‘Griffith dear, don’t forget to say a kind word to Israel about David. *Now* he must do something better for him.’

‘He ought, at all events; but Israel’s a man difficult to deal with in things that he considers as

belonging not to an employer's province, but his own. As manager, I may tell you, Maggy, I have immense faith in him, and expect great things from him. It wasn't merely what he said and did that influenced me the other day to put him so suddenly in Barrett's place, but from a boy I have known him, and have always had the same idea of him. He's not a pleasant man, but a man of real worth to those who know how to use him. My brother acted brutishly to Israel. He knew his abilities, and profited by them, just so far as it suited his convenience, but hindered him from getting one step higher, lest he might either get too strong a hold and make himself too valuable, or go elsewhere, and become as great a man as himself. What's the time? Half-past five! What a dark, gloomy morning! I must make haste, or I shall be setting a bad example at the outset. Don't you know,' he said with a laugh, as he kissed and parted with his wife, 'I am now one of the captains of industry, and must mind my p's and q's?'

As he approached the ugly group of buildings that surrounded the pit's mouth, he saw Israel

standing there to watch the colliers descend; and Griffith thought that as no one had yet noticed him, he would slip into a dark corner, and similarly watch Israel's own behaviour under his new dignity.

The news of the Overman's elevation had rapidly flown, and it was amusing to see the differing attitudes of the colliers as they recognised him.

One man seemed almost inclined to kneel in reverence for Israel's condescension in wishing him 'Good morning,' till Israel's dry question, 'Drinking last night?' caused him to collect himself, and hurry into the cage, followed by a laugh from his comrades.

Another turned full face upon Israel, as he said—

'It's a fine thing to be in luck, Master Israel. Luck's a very fine thing, ain't it?'

'Give me time to try, lad,' said Israel quietly, and without offence.

When the last of the working colliers had gone down, the night-deputy came up from below, and seeing Israel, went to him and held out his hand.

Just for a brief space Israel delayed to take it, but then the two hands met, and seemingly a cordial grasp was given.

The deputy was a man whom the most indifferent person could scarcely pass without noticing, for the unearthly blaze of the eye ; which shone out of the cadaverous, murky face like an unnaturally beautiful star during some portentous aspect of the heavens. He was of small, spare form, and sharp, thin features. These were inexpressibly sad, yet with a kind of darkened radiance upon them, as though their natural light were under some partial and inexplicable eclipse.

It was a face where, in the profound tenderness of the gloom, in the great hollows under the eyes, in the sharp extremities of the nose and chin, and in the shrunken yet sensitive nostrils, Death's fingers might have recently passed ; but with a touch so stricken, kindly, and hesitating, that at last he spared him to live on ; without, however, removing from that wan, worn countenance the signs of the fatal sentence he had visibly stamped there in token it was but a reprieve after all he accorded.

The same kind of effect was produced by the contrast between the powerful expression of the head, and the thin, skeleton-like frame; which looked in the bulky clothes as if raised from some graveyard and reanimated, either to benefit the owner by some new period in which to expiate sin, or because his previous life had been too valuable to be prematurely lost to his fellow-creatures.

While engaged in his duties he was calm, collected, and thoroughly efficient; but when alone, and he was able to retire into the mental solitude he so much loved, his lips would be seen moving incessantly in silent communion with his own inner self.

Such was the man who had aided David in the mine, and who now addressed Israel:—

‘I congratulate thee, Manager Mort,’ he said, after a prolonged pause, during which he looked searchingly and wistfully into Israel’s face.

‘I congratulate *thee*, Overman Rees Thomas,’ was the reply, with just sufficient emphasis on the word Overman to indicate the new dignity.

The slightest tinge of colour seemed to appear

on the pale, hollow cheek, as Rees Thomas spake again—

‘If thou sayest that seriously I thank thee; and shall try, with the Lord’s help, to do my duty; but if thou madest the mistake of supposing I was seeking my own advancement and vain-glory when I offered my congratulations, thou didst me wrong. No, friend Israel, I was yearning after better things.’

‘Which some day thou shalt talk to me about once more.’

‘Again thou mistakest. It is not thyself of whom I speak, but of these benighted creatures here below our feet. Israel Mort, dost thou recognise the hand that has done this for thee? Dost thou thank the Lord? Art thou determined to make this, the greatest event in thy life, redound to His glory and honour, rather than to thine own?’

‘Rees Thomas, I am not given to so much talk. Do you accept the post of Overman?’

‘Do you withdraw your objections to my holding the men together for prayers at the beginning of the day’s toil; they shall be brief—

ay, brief as may be the lives of every one of us, which we cannot depend upon for an hour?’

‘I have said No a dozen times, have I not? Again I say No!’

The speaker’s voice was harsh, and the tone expressed the sense of habitual soreness on the subject.

‘Then I refuse. My sin of complicity is great enough already. I will undertake no higher responsibilities to make my neglect of His message more criminal.’

Israel paused a moment to restrain his ire, for he knew no man whose value he could for a moment think of as equal in comparison with Rees Thomas’s. And even then, as the latter was getting into the cage to descend again, on account of the employer’s visit, he could not but let the words escape him—

‘Remember, if I have to find a new Overman, he may ask me to let him choose a new deputy.’

‘He may ; and if he does, you will displace me. It is well. Perhaps it is to that God is guiding me. Useless, here, I may——’ At that moment the signal was given, the cage descended, and the two men were abruptly separated.

Pondering over this conversation, in which he had been deeply interested, Griffith did not care for the moment to comment upon it to Israel.

Moving, therefore, slowly round some of the buildings, he presented himself from a different point to the new manager, and shook him by the hand.

Israel's eye at once glanced at his employer's dress. Then he strode away to a little office, asking Griffith to follow him. Here the silk hat was exchanged for one of leather, stiffened, so it seemed, with centuries of dirt and perspiration; over his blue frock he put on an old waterproof with sleeves; and lastly, he exchanged his own boots for a pair such as he had never before even dimly conceived the possibility of, so ludicrously clumsy and shapeless were they.

Israel, however, saw nothing in the transformation but its necessity, and could but vaguely understand the practical jest which so tickled Griffith. Israel was in no ordinary sense of the word a humorous man.

The mirthful mood of Griffith was to undergo

a great change as the cage would bear him down, and he begin to realise that dim, awful mystery, the depth and darkness of the earth as laid bare in the greater mines.

They moved on to the pit mouth. There Griffith found an empty tram waiting for him, lined throughout with canvas, to defend him from touching the dirty inside; and with a roll of canvas for him to sit on.

But though this attention to his comfort did not escape Griffith's pleased eye, he was much more, and unpleasantly, impressed with the cage into which he was to go. It seemed to him actually too low even to sit in upright.

It was a solid iron cage in three stages, so that three trams full of coal could be brought up at once, or three batches of men or materials sent down. Griffith found on enquiry this was the only mode for ascent and descent in the mine; and he felt strongly inclined to remonstrate on the unseemliness of it as regards the men, and its extreme unsuitability in cases of accidents when wounded and dying persons might have to be brought up. He restrained himself, however, and

got in, helped by Israel and a couple of colliers, who fairly lifted him over the tram edge.

‘Sit down, sir,’ said Israel. ‘Lower! Still lower! You really must incline your head a little more down. That will do. Now, please, don’t move!’

He did not, but the tram did; being pushed forward into the lowermost compartment of the iron cage; the roof of which seemed, by a well-known optical delusion, to slide over and shut him as in a trap—only a few inches above his face, and his painfully huddled-up form.

This, with the sudden darkness, and the apparent absence of all air, excited so great a sense of oppression, of difficult breathing, of danger through suffocation, that he almost decided to tell Israel to stop, and refuse to go down, until he could do so by some less alarming mode. But while he hesitated about the unmanliness of it, and the loss of caste it might bring him, the hammer was heard giving the signal, and the cage began to descend; slower than usual on account of Israel’s considerateness for his employer.

The moment Griffith perceived this he almost cursed his manager’s kindness, for he felt growing

worse every instant, and could only hope to reach the bottom with the least possible delay, and there find the air he now prayed for as for dear life.

He had no organic disease, but there were elements of disorder in his frame, that rendered him peculiarly liable to physical suffering—perhaps physical danger from the position he was in.

To amuse him Israel told him brief anecdotes of his own and his fellows' history regarding accidents in the shaft; finishing with a bit of statistics showing how large a proportion of all mining calamities occur in the shaft, or connected with it, especially in the going up and down.

But Griffith heard nothing he said. He was feeling each instant that he should never reach the bottom without fainting, and what that might involve under such circumstances he could not but foresee. But he kept silent, knowing that no earthly power could shorten the ordeal for him. He now only thought of death—of things that should have been attended to, but had not been; of his wife and children and dependents; and then waited, conscious it was simply now a race between the cage downwards to possible safety,

and the deleterious power that seemed bent on destroying him before he could touch the bottom, and hope at least for relief.

Will he ever forget the moment when it did stop; and that other moment when the tram having been pushed away from the cage, he found himself again where he could breathe, sit up, stand, see dimly; and above all, feel the delicious life-giving breeze that came sweeping over and by him?

He told his wife afterwards that, ludicrous as the narrative then seemed to him if he viewed it as others must do, he would not, as regards himself, again risk it for the entire value of the mine.

When he was calm enough to look back on the cage, he could hardly help wondering that he should have been such an ass as to get into the tram, which naturally excluded all air except such infinitesimal portions as might come in over the edge between that and the cage roof; whereas if he had gone down, standing as the colliers did, bending low within the open cage, he would at all events have had air, and been spared the hideous yet half grotesque suffering he had gone through.

Israel no doubt had meant all for the best; so Griffith simply told him, as if he wanted to test and try all things to-day, he would go up in the usual way. When he did so at the close of his visit, he experienced no inconvenience of the kind that had so alarmed him.

His uncomfortable thoughts and feelings soon passed away, as the danger of the descent, which had been a very real one, passed too; and his spirits rose as he remembered how carefully he had kept himself from any the least outward sign of affright.

As the cage rested at the bottom he was handed out by Israel. At first he was confused by the noise of the pumps, by the little twinkling lights, by the gleams on the water pit, or sump, and by the sharp rush of the air about him, moved by artificial force.

Then, as he grew used to the place he heard peculiar sounds; and going on a little, and turning, he saw in a rudely dug out arched recess of the rock the dim forms of a number of colliers standing bare-headed in a reverential attitude, candles

or lamps in hand, and Rees Thomas reading from a Bible with great fervour.

Griffith glanced round enquiringly at Israel, who stood silent, grim, but took no notice of his employer's gesture.

‘He has disobeyed you,’ whispered Griffith.

‘And not for the first time,’ was the stern reply. ‘But it shall be for the last!’

‘So’—thought Griffith to himself—‘he means to be master here of those under him, and gives me a hint at the same time to that effect.’

He was wise enough, however, to understand the worthlessness of responsibility without power, and his only remark came in the shape of a question:—

‘Why do you object to this?’ he asked in a low tone.

‘Because it sets men thinking, and fills their hearts with vain imaginings. The best and happiest miner is he who thinks of nothing but how to win coal while in the mine, and of nothing but how best to forget it altogether when out of the mine.’

‘I’d let him alone.’

‘That man, an officer, has disobeyed positive orders.’

‘Oblige me by saying nothing to him about it at present, or till we have talked the matter over.’

After a pause, Israel said, dryly, ‘Very well.’ Then he added, as with prudent afterthought—

‘We tried it once for nearly two years, in order to please a lot of fanatics, but were obliged to give it up through the rows that broke out between them who did like it, and the hauliers who didn’t.’

‘Hush!’ ejaculated Griffith, as, the reading finished, the party began to sing with touching homeliness and fervour the hymn which has for its first line—

‘For a rock to build on.’

Then an aged grey-haired man began to pray. His accents were feeble, but the spirit in his soul made them penetrate far into the dim recesses around.

A younger collier, his son, succeeded; one who had but lately joined the ‘praying lot,’ as irreverent colliers called them. It was most touching to watch the face of the old collier as he listened for the first time in his life to the earnest,

rough but manly tones and words in which his son addressed others, using his own discreditable experience in candid confession for their common benefit. The grimy tears were rolling down his face as the son finished.

A third prayer followed—they were all brief—and then they sang a second hymn, and the service was over ; lasting a little more than twenty minutes.

As they separated and went each away to his arduous and dangerous labour, Griffith could not but ask himself which of these two classes—the men who had a real abiding faith in something higher than themselves, something nobler than this world, or the men who had it not—were the likeliest to be the best workmen, the best citizens, the best husbands, sons and fathers ; and so asking, felt no sort of doubt about the answer.

That morning's service then, in which he had been deeply interested, should be another of the various matters he reserved for the present to go into at a later day with Israel, when he felt he could more gracefully and more wisely interfere.

When the men had dispersed, Rees Thomas was

seen to be waiting within sight of the two persons on whom his future so much depended, as if to say to them, ' Here I am if you want me ; ' but as they made no sign, he went away through that same low black arch through which the general current of collier life had gone before him, and which reminded Griffith of the famous line from Dante—' Abandon hope, all ye who enter here ! '

A moment after he was angry at his own thought ; it seemed so unpleasantly—so inconveniently suggestive. He felt as guilty as a king caught in the act of teaching his subjects disloyalty.

While he followed Israel step by step through the main level, or central way, he could but smile at his own anticipations, which had been of something more than discomfort. It was not a pleasant place to choose for a promenade certainly, for he had to keep up a perpetual series of difficult strides from sleeper to sleeper, as the timbers crossed between the rails of the tramway, or to walk with easier steps in some inches of water which was flowing outwards from the recesses of the mine ; while in constant danger (if he moved in an up-

right posture) of knocking his head against some irregular beam of wood placed for the support of the roof where the natural rock was giving way.

Then, too, when the signal was given of trams coming he had to huddle away his somewhat luxuriant growth of person in a miserable little refuge hole at the side, and there crouch and shrink as the train went past with its seemingly interminable trams.

But when, proud of his own equanimity during this preliminary experience, he began to reason as against an imaginary antagonist, that after all the disagreeables of mining had been absurdly exaggerated, he was quickly brought to silence by Israel's leaving this central level to go through the side ones—'stalls,' as he called them—each of which led, sometimes through long distances, and by ways that seemed to become more and more low, and narrow, and stifling, to the face of the coal, where the miners were actually at work.

All these roads had been, as Israel explained, excavated through the coal; and the walls, or 'pillars,' were masses of coal, still left for support between the stalls for the roadways.

‘ And you see, sir,’ remarked Israel, ‘ that as the vein of coal is but shallow, when we have got that, we don’t care to go on digging at the useless rocks merely to give us grand approaches.’

Griffith saw the force of the logic without exactly appreciating it ; for he was now, and had been for some time, not walking, but plunging along head foremost, his back painfully bent, yet never for one instant getting a chance of relief by an upright posture, his feet slipping now into pools of water, now into black greasy sludge, his head experiencing one incessant series of shocks, which no past experience could guard him from while having to move on so fast after Israel, who alarmed him terribly with the fear of being left behind. And, indeed, this did happen just for a minute or two when Israel left him without warning alone in the dark ; and he felt like a fly drawn by some irresistible and hideous attraction along one of the lines of the web of a gigantic underground spider squatted in some unknown centre, from which all these levels seemed to radiate.

The darkness was horrible to him. He would

have been obliged to shout loudly to Israel, had the latter delayed his return much longer. But he came, and explained that he had been desirous to ascertain if the district they were approaching, and which contained the only dangerous workings, were as safe and pure as they had been when he visited the spot a few hours before. He had, he said, found a little gas, and cleared it away; and now Griffith might be perfectly satisfied there was no danger of his going on.

Griffith thought on the whole he was tired, and had seen enough. He could visit the mine again. Of course, he should do so; perhaps frequently—that was his duty. Couldn't they rest somewhere? He really must sit down, since he could not stand up; his back felt broken.

Israel was remorseless. There were other stalls he must see—one, at all events.

Griffith consented to the one.

Presently they stopped before a door, which was opened by a pull from some unseen hand down in the dark corner by the side.

Griffith held forth his lamp to see who was

there, and beheld a little fellow huddled up, cord in hand, a picture of the saddest, blankest, most hopeless-looking misery he had ever seen.

In the dark—hour after hour—no light permitted, and nothing, therefore, to read; and as to thoughts, God help the poor little creatures to keep thoughts away from them which, for a time at least, suggest nothing but explosions, burns, ‘lamings,’ if they don’t bring things even more terrible still—the ghosts of dead men or boys they have known, and who have been killed in the mine.

Something else—though for the moment what it was Griffith did not know—induced him again to look at the little fellow, whose white eyes glared spectre-like out of the dusky face and hair. Then, hearing the call of Israel, who waited for him, he passed on with a sigh, and the mental remark, ‘This, too, Master Israel, shall be seen about by-and-by, or I will know the reason.’

When he came up to the Overman he said, though merely for the sake of saying something to cover his delay, and the thoughts excited by the fate of such poor lads,—

‘Do you know, Israel, I fancy I have seen that boy somewhere; how wretched he looks!’

‘He’ll get used to that. And as to your seeing him—why, it’s David.’

‘Good God, Israel, you don’t say so. I must go back and speak to him, if but for a moment.’

‘I beg you, sir, to do nothing of the kind,’ said Israel, arresting his arm with no very gentle touch. ‘He’s quiet now—to excite him again would be cruel and *useless*.’

‘And do you really mean him to go through all this?’ asked Griffith, in undisguised astonishment.

‘Why not? I did! and without his advantages. I had nothing to hope for; he has everything.’

‘But what is your aim?’

‘To larn him to be a man—a strong man—one who, having first been master of himself, and got to know, shall then use his mastery and his knowledge to go further and higher than I can.’

‘You surprise me! You——.’ He was interrupted.

‘Shall we go on, sir? As I said, ’tis but one place more.’

‘I suppose so,’ responded Griffith wearily.

And bitterly he reproached himself for his folly when he found the way get still narrower, lower, and more disgustingly foul with the black slimy mud, so that at last he had to lie down and wriggle his body over some foul rubbish that had lately fallen from the roof and broken a man’s arm. It was an arduous and loathsome task that had to be got through before he could reach the place where Israel already was, and waiting for him.

Whether his new manager had any secret aim in thus disgusting him with the actual details of mining life, Griffith had not yet formally asked himself; even while he felt that if Israel did seek to achieve in that way a certain independence in his future schemes of labour, he had already succeeded.

‘These falls of roof, Israel, are awkward things!’

‘Yes, they cost a deal of money.’

‘I didn’t mean that. I mean the injury to life. But I suppose the danger looks worse than it is.’

‘On the contrary, the danger is far greater than it looks,’ said Israel. ‘Out of a thousand lives

lost yearly in the United Kingdom, between four and five hundred are due to falls.'

'Is it possible!'

'A fall might even now take place, and on so large a scale as to stop our return for ever—at least alive.'

It was well that Israel could not just then see Griffith Williams's face, even though he—perhaps accidentally—held up his lamp towards it.

Griffith restrained his tongue determinedly. He was there, and must not lose caste with his servant, and that servant Israel Mort; but he mentally resolved that only some most pressing occasion should ever take him again where he was.

Presently he had a great relief. Israel led him to a gob, or receptacle for the rubbish, chiefly loose stones that accumulate in working. There he could lie down and stretch his aching limbs, and take any posture he liked, except the upright one; for in all other directions there was plenty of room.

Sitting or reclining in the hollow face of the gob, with a fresh breezy air playing about him, and luxuriating in the secret consciousness that a

most unpleasant task was now fairly got over, he recovered his natural geniality.

‘May I smoke?’

‘No. Against the rules.’

‘Is it just now dangerous?’

‘No.’

‘If I do smoke?’

‘You’ll be fined.’

‘And the fines go to——’

‘The colliers’ benefit fund.’

‘Why, then, it’s an eminently patriotic act to do.’

He pulled out his cigar-case, and offered a cigar to Israel.

‘Do you absolutely persist in spite of my warning?’ asked Israel seriously.

‘Don’t you see? The thing’s done — irrevocable.’

A puff of smoke passed towards Israel’s face.

‘Very well. I shall record the facts in my book.’ And he began to write.

‘Do, and add that, seeing no further harm could possibly happen through your participation, you had to levy two fines instead of one.’

A grim smile broke out on Israel's face, and soon broadened into a hoarse laugh, the only way he could laugh, as he took the proffered cigar, and followed the example set him.

They continued to smoke for some time in silence.

'Well now, Israel, give me some idea of what must be done. What are these colossal undertakings you dimly foreshadow as likely to turn me into a new Croesus?'

'A second shaft.'

Griffith groaned in spirit, and sighed aloud.

'Go on,' he said.

'Some thousands of new fir props must be obtained and put up to make the levels even decently safe.'

'Costly job,' said Griffith, looking grave.
'Really necessary?'

'A knife cuts into them like cheese in many places.'

'Proceed.'

'Then the engine boilers are so worn as to be dangerous; the spears of the pumping apparatus should be replaced; and there are many other less

important but still serious things to be attended to——’

‘Costing money?’

‘Yes.’

‘In fact, Israel, you are preparing me—mildly—for going to work to make what shall be equivalent to an entirely new plant—eh?’

‘Something like that, I own.’

‘Quite out of the question. Quite. So if that’s all the prospect——’

‘Wishing no harm to you, Mr. Griffith, I do wish it might be in effect a new plant, as that would admit of so many improvements, so much greater economy in winning the coal, and increase so immensely the annual production of the mine.’

‘Would it?’ asked Griffith earnestly, again lending himself to the thought inspired by Israel’s unmistakable earnestness and faith; and half inclining to consider how capital might be raised to do the job once for all in a masterly style.

Israel did not directly answer this query.

‘Do you know, sir,’ he said, ‘that the land in which this mine lies was offered to an ancestor of mine in exchange for a cow?’

‘And of course he accepted?’

‘No; the innocent declined.’ The depth of scorn with which Israel pronounced the word innocent was something to remember.

‘Surely that was never *your* ancestor?’ said Griffith, with unconcealed irony.

‘If he wasn’t, he ought to have been, in accord with marriage law,’ said Israel, and then went on. ‘Well, sir, as is the difference between the value of that piece of waste land in the last century and now, so is the value of your mine as it is, and as what it might be.’

‘Are you serious? Do you know or weigh what you say? Stop, I entreat you, and think.’ Griffith’s voice trembled, his hands were damp with perspiration, he was evidently losing his self-control.

‘I say what I say, and know what I know,’ thundered Israel, yielding to the contagion of Griffith’s excitement; and feeling the dramatic instinct, that is so strong in the hearts of us all, put him into artistic sympathy with his employer.

They talked on after that a long while, and with increasing respect in Griffith Williams’s mind for

the knowledge and efficiency of his new manager, and with increasing faith in his previsions of the future goal to be reached ; but also with a certain undercurrent of dissatisfaction at Israel's utter disregard of and recklessness about the more humane, religious, and philanthropic aspects of mining affairs, which Griffith thought much of in connection with certain projects for the comfort and elevation and security of the workmen.

He tried to discuss them with Israel, but the latter exhibited his contempt for the subject so nakedly and so promptly, that Griffith found it difficult afterwards to go on and explain himself, and so for the moment let the question drop.

The sums required, too, were very large for a man of Griffith's means, even if only reparation—but sufficient reparation—were decided on ; but hopelessly beyond him if the dead works and machinery were to be made equivalent to those of a new plant.

Buoyant with hope, yet burdened with the fear of an overwhelming expenditure ; desirous to be a real captain of industry, one who acknowledged duties as well as claimed profits, and at the same

time afraid that Israel Mort would in that way be as a perpetual thorn festering in his side ; loathing the actual mine as seen with his bodily eyes, but finding entrancing beauties and delights in it when seen only through the spirit's vision of the fruits, Griffith Williams went home that day to find everything about him already undergoing a change ;—his rooms looked low—little—mean ; his furniture shabby ; his servants vulgar ; his wife—well, he loved her, but he must—he would—say, and with as little of bitterness as possible, she looked and moved, and spoke more ‘ *domesticated* ’ than ever.

He wandered about all the rest of the day on the mountains, stopping occasionally to lie down on the slope and fill page after page of his notebook with figures. Then he would go on again, as if possessed by an unquiet spirit ; till feeling his fatigue alike of body and mind, he would throw himself at full length upon a pleasant moss-covered spot on the banks of the little stream, and ask himself in tribulation of spirit whether he was not endangering by such speculations the good he possessed and the peace that he yet might possess

if he would but discipline and attune his spirit properly, rather than enhancing the good or the peace by the creation of the wealth he already saw within his grasp.

The night he spent was certainly not one of sleep, or rest, or comfort, or happiness. Whether it was a night profitably spent may be better judged when Israel and he shall meet again as appointed, with full details before them of all the manager proposes.

CHAPTER XII.

SHOWING HOW ISRAEL HELPED MR. GRIFFITH TO
A DECISION.

IF the woman who hesitates is lost, the man who hesitates is often saved.

Griffith Williams had in him an instinct of caution, which formed a valuable counterbalance to his impulsiveness and constant desire to relieve the tedium of existence by change.

He and Israel laboured, day by day, week by week, through estimates, and proposals, and histories of other successful collieries; and thus seemed to get nearer and nearer to that state of satisfaction which springs from an exhaustive enquiry.

But Israel himself, as a man, did not win upon him as did Israel's general scheme.

Strange to say, one element of this result was a half fancy, almost a definite suspicion, that Israel reciprocated the personal want of sympathy.

This annoyed Griffith. It seemed at once so humiliating and so grotesquely absurd.

He tried to convince himself he was mistaken ; but the only result was confirmation of his dislike, and belief in Israel's dislike, to which he thought he found the key-note in a little incident that occurred.

They had been discussing the character of a conspicuous man of the neighbourhood, and Griffith, perhaps with a certain desire to talk at Israel, had been praising his balanced mind, his habit of looking at both sides of a question, and deliberating calmly while others were urging him to immediate action, when Mort interrupted him :—

‘ Yes, he deliberates so long, that when he decides he finds his chance gone, and his decision no longer worth twopence. I spit at such men. Always half-and-half in everything—and no two of his halves making a whole. A man who'll never do any good for himself nor anybody else.’

‘You are severe,’ said Griffith, colouring in spite of his effort to seem indifferent.

‘I mean it,’ retorted Israel, who was in a bad humour that day at finding no progress made.

What did, what could Israel want? Griffith asked himself seriously. Did this look like expectation of the acceptance of his schemes? He was bound to say, no.

What, then, could Israel be thinking of? Did he want him to sell the mine? Or did he want to be discharged? Had he lost, in a word, faith in his new master, much more rapidly and decisively than his new master in him, and was he pondering new schemes?

About this time a terrible explosion took place in a neighbouring colliery, and for weeks together the whole neighbourhood was full of lamentation for the killed and wounded, who in numbers almost equalled that of a small battle-field. The villages were blackened with funeral processions; charges of the most painful, and some of the most sinister character, were rumoured about as to the causes of the accident, till Griffith, who followed all the details with an irresistible but most de-

pressing fascination, felt that he would not for the world occupy the position of the unfortunate owners.

Precisely at that moment Israel began to press upon him the absolute necessity of heavy and immediate outlay, if he would guard his own mine and his own people from a similar calamity.

No time could be worse. Griffith had just satisfied himself that between philanthropy and profit (such profit as alone attracted him) there was no common ground, but that one must be chosen and the other left. Need we then wonder that Griffith was wearied out with his importunity, and told him so.

When three months had been spent in this shilly-shally fashion, Israel came one morning at a much earlier hour than was usual with him, to see his employer ; and, as Griffith guessed, to worry him with the old subject. As he noticed the more than ordinarily hard, rigid, expressionless character of his manager's face, he could not but satirically say to himself, 'There's something up ! That's the way and the only way in which Israel's

face tells tales—it is so determined to say nothing.’

Pleased with his jest, however, he thought no more of what might be the tales that Israel’s face thus told, if any, but addressed himself to his own thoughts and objects, which had now at last become pretty well defined. Quite suddenly, and as though the thought had but just then occurred for the first time, he put a question :—

‘Israel, if I were inclined to sell, do you think you could get me a purchaser?’

Israel stared in his employer’s face, and seemed so veritably surprised, that Griffith grew half ashamed of his little trick of testing by an abrupt question whether his manager had or had not already got such a thought in his brain.

‘You are surprised, I see. And you have a right to be so. But the fact is, my conscience and my thirst for gain find they can’t pull satisfactorily together; so as a Christian, you know, I am bound to choose the better part. What say you? Should not one’s faith and one’s will go together?’

‘He’s a poor creature that doubts it,’ drily responded Israel. ‘I didn’t know before they were two things—they arn’t with me.’

‘Well,’ said Griffith, after a disagreeable pause, ‘will you try to find me a customer? You know more about the mine than I do.’

‘What price?’

‘What say you to thirty thousand pounds?’

Israel gave vent to an exclamation—then with an eloquent gesture of his hands, without saying one word, made Griffith so heartily ashamed of his proposal that he was embarrassed to proceed.

After an awkward silence, Israel said—

‘Seeing the old woman’s interest, which must be first satisfied—seeing the lot of capital that must be put into the mine, before much more coal can be taken out, would you, rather than let a customer go, take half, that is, fifteen thousand?’

‘Pooh! You are jesting!’

‘I say, sir, would you rather lose a customer than take fifteen thousand?’

‘Really, what a positive fellow you are. How you stick to a thing when you have said it. Say sixteen!’

‘Fifteen thousand pounds!’ doggedly repeated Israel. ‘Will you take that?’

‘Yes,’ said Griffith, with a sigh as of relief, that he had at last decided something. ‘Yes, I think I would if I can get no more, but you must fight for at least twenty thousand.’

‘I am but a new man at managing and agency, and must expect to be dubiously looked on by great folk, capitalists, and colliery owners, if I go on such a business without authority; in fact, I might do damage, but couldn’t do good.’

‘That’s true. What do you wish?’

‘Whatever’s best for the job.’

Both the men after this were silent for a minute or two, deliberating;—perhaps waiting each for the other to begin again.

At last the impulsive man could be still no longer :—

‘You seem very cautious all of a sudden,’ he remarked to Israel.

‘A man’s character may be hurt by things like this, unless he goes safe guarded. You ask me if can find a purchaser. I say, however difficult the job, one can but try.’

Then came another pause, and the two scanned each other's face furtively, until their glances met, and Griffith laughed outright.

Then he began to write in his note-book, to rub out, and re-write, until finally he satisfied himself.

‘What if I give you something like this?’ he said, and he read aloud the following letter :—

‘Dear Sir,—I am so utterly inexperienced in colliery management, and so unwilling to embark in it, without clearer light than I at present possess, that I shall be glad if you can find a purchaser at a fair price.’ ‘Will that do?’

‘Yes, for one letter, the one to be shown. But I shall want another giving me authority to sell, and fixing the lowest price.’

Again Griffith wrote, and afterwards read aloud :—

‘Dear Sir,—If you can obtain for me—’

‘Less commission of five per cent.,’ interposed Israel, as if that were the most matter-of-fact thing in the world.

Griffith raised his eyebrows, but inserted the words, and then again read :—

‘If you can obtain for me, less commission of five per cent. for yourself, fifteen thousand pounds, I will accept, and so settle the matter.’

Israel begged him to read the letter a second time ; and when Griffith had done so, asked him whether he would mind—as he, Israel, liked to be clear in all things, and this was a weighty business for a poor man to be engaged in—would he mind saying he did accept, and not merely he would ? A sale might go off in the very moment of its prosperity on such an uncertainty as might be here raised by a verbal quibble.

So Griffith, with many misgivings as to the general propriety of his course, but seeing no tangible reason for a refusal, as to mere details, wrote :—

‘If you obtain for me, less five per cent. commission for yourself, fifteen thousand pounds, I hereby authorise you to conclude the sale.’

But Israel wanted something more—and suggested this :—

‘And without waiting for you to communicate

with me, I hereby guarantee to confirm and complete your act as that of my agent and servant.'

'Please add that,' said Israel, 'and then I shan't trouble you any further.'

Griffith could not at the moment look, as he desired to do, in Israel's face; somehow the man overmastered him; and though he did not own that to himself, he did own to a sense of impending danger, and he did try to evade it by a few last moments of reflection, as he bent over his note-book, while seeming merely to correct the phraseology.

But the whole business had become an intolerable burden. Why not, then, shake it off? What could there be to fear? Certainly he would get the fifteen thousand pounds before parting with the mine; Israel could not be ass enough to think of dodging him out of that by postponed payments?

No, the thing was right he was going to do. He had been alarming himself about nothing. He would hesitate no more.

Accordingly he wrote the two letters fairly out, and left them on the table to dry.

And then what better could he do than give free play to the secret interest he felt, and to the amusement he gained as a student of human nature in watching the development of such a character and policy as Israel's under such exceptional circumstances?

The sense of one's own superiority gives great zest to this kind of thing.

So he chatted awhile with Israel, wondering he did not seem more eager to get the coveted documents, if they were coveted.

And Israel chatted on, as if he had forgotten them.

'Well, I hope it won't be long before I get my fifteen thousand pounds, and you your seven hundred and fifty.'

'Ready and willin', sir, I assure you,' responded Israel.

'Why you'll be a millionaire! Seven hundred and fifty pounds! Are you sure you know how much money that is?' asked Griffith laughingly.

'I have handled a few bits of paper when

going to and fro the bank for Mr. Jehoshaphat on some special occasion, that would ha' counted seven hundred and fifty a many times over.'

'And didn't you feel qualmish? Eh?'

'I reklect once wondering how it'd be if one lighted one's pipe with 'em. And that's about all I reklect.'

'Come, Israel, take up your letters.'

Israel did as he was bid. He took up the letters, read them in methodical order—number one, then number two. After that he drew forth a capacious greasy-looking pocket-book, and put them carefully into it one by one.

In the same methodical manner he drew forth a couple of folded papers from the book, placed them on the table, and then returned the book to the safe-keeping of the breast of his coat, which he buttoned closely up.

Taking up one of the two papers, he opened it out, and placed it before Griffith to read.

'Only my idea of the form,' remarked Israel quietly.

And Griffith, who found quite a fund of enjoyment in all these little traits of careful formality, read out the form with grave decorum:—

‘ Israel Mort hereby agrees, on behalf of Griffith Williams, Esquire, of the “ Farm,” as owner of the Cwm Aber Colliery, to sell all his right and interest in the said colliery of Cwm Aber, with whatever privileges belong to it, to _____ for the sum of fifteen thousand pounds, in pursuance of the authority confided to him by the said Griffith Williams ; and the said _____ hereby agrees to buy the said colliery at the said price, and has duly deposited five thousand pounds in advance, as earnest money that the bargain is definitively concluded, at the Bank of Tygroes, which sum now waits the disposition of the said Griffith Williams, and for which the said Israel Mort holds the receipt. The other ten thousand pounds to be paid as soon as the entire property shall be formally given up, and the papers, deeds, &c., that may be found necessary shall be duly prepared and approved on both sides, and signed. The blank for the name of the purchaser, Israel Mort has full authority to insert.

Signature

Witnesses }

Griffith laughed heartily as he read this docu-

ment, which seemed to show Israel was determined there should be no question of payment, provided only the sale could be accomplished.

‘Do you approve of that, sir?’ asked Israel.

‘Quite, quite! Only I fear your customer, if you catch one, will think you ride an uncommonly high horse.’

‘And if at any time from this present speaking you receive a *bonâ fide* document like that, but filled up and signed and witnessed, and the five thousand banked, you will be satisfied to take it as a settled thing?’

‘Not satisfied only, but pleased; pleased, Israel, to see how carefully you have secured me.’

Was it a sudden gleam of sunshine breaking through a cloud in the heavens that so suddenly made Israel’s hard face seem transfigured as he drew forth another paper, a counterpart of the first, *but without blanks*, and placed it before Griffith Williams’s astonished—incredulous eyes?

‘A good servant likes to please a kind master, even to the extent of anticipating his wishes. The job is done. Old Mrs. Williams has, as you there see, bought the mine, paid in the money, and got a counter-part of that dockement.’

CHAPTER XIII.

DIVIDING THE SPOIL.

FEW things are more calculated to try the temper of our humanity than, while engaged in a process of condescending benevolence towards some inferior, to find him turn upon us and expose our movements and motives not only to the ridicule of the world but to our own.

Such was the fate of the amiable and excellent Mr. Williams, when he realised the full force of Israel's manipulation of him, as shown by the production of the completed agreement—only one moment after the right to make such an agreement had been formally and irrevocably conceded.

And he had been studying Israel !

Studying him ? Yes, as the natural philosopher, from the serenest intellectual heights, may, in his

hours of recreation, study the ways and system of an unfamiliar animal when brought in contact with it; that is to say, with all the zest of novelty and conscious skill, and self-possession, till suddenly he receives so severe, so well-directed, and so utterly unexpected a shock to *his* ways and system, as to suggest the idea that it was he who had been the true subject of scientific study and benevolent research.

Griffith's first impulse was to snatch up from the table the agreement for the sale of the mine and tear it into a hundred pieces; but Israel's watchful eye and composed look warned him to pause and reflect before further committing himself.

The story was as yet known in its fulness only to Israel, who would certainly not care to enlighten the neighbours about the details if not provoked. Was it wise, then, to give the provocation that might lead to his being made the laughing-stock of all who knew him?

He saw, too, that Israel evidently did his best to modulate his rough voice and soften his stony features, in the desire to avoid anything like an aspect

of triumph. Still, Griffith's own features reddened with shame as, in the hope of discovering some honest loophole for escape from the bargain, he found he was merely recalling, step by step, the processes by which Israel had guided him—as if he were a mere puppet in his hands—direct to an appointed goal.

‘You will, perhaps, sir, walk down to the bank in the course of the day, and see that it is all right about the money?’ said Israel, after a long pause—a most embarrassing one, surely, to any one but himself.

‘Israel,’ broke out his late employer in passionate anger, ‘what is the meaning of this sharp practice with me? Have you suddenly discovered that I am a liar, vagabond, or rogue—one whose spoken word is not to be trusted?’

‘No, sir, by no means,’ replied Israel, with respect and deference.

‘Then it is you who are——.’ Griffith felt he was going too far, and stopped.

‘It’s just this, sir. Seeing for some time past you had so much difficulty to make up your mind, and finding the delay partickler inconvenient and

dangerous, I thought I'd try to help you, when you did get into the mood for action.'

The serious tone in which these words were uttered, and the gravity of Israel's demeanour the while, could not disguise from his former master the contempt that breathed through them.

But it occurred to him that it might be Israel's policy, perhaps, to force from him at once whatever violent things he might be tempted to say in his present state of anger and suspicion; so he checked by a great effort the storm of bitter reproach that was struggling to break forth, and said to Israel with as much of calmness and dignity as the circumstances permitted, while his voice trembled, and his lips were unnaturally pale—

'Israel, you have only yourself to blame if I refuse at this moment either to accept or refuse the bargain you now profess you have made for me, even while you were also professing to be only trying to make it. What I shall do after I have had time to think, and to take counsel, you will doubtless hear in due time. Good morning.'

He went to the door, opened it, and waited for Israel to go.

Israel stood up, and just the slightest tinge of colour—more yellow however than red—suffused his face as he confronted Mr. Griffith Williams.

He moved a few paces towards that gentleman, as if he and not the door were his object. Then as he came close, his tall form erect, his naturally stern face deeper than ever Griffith Williams had yet seen it, in dark intensity and inscrutability of purpose, he said—

‘You owe me, I think, seven hundred and fifty pounds for commission. I will, if you please, call on you to-morrow for that.’

He bowed in his somewhat ungainly fashion, keeping his eyes fixed on Griffith Williams’s face till he was quite outside the door, which was then suddenly slammed after him with terrific violence and noise. This did not, however, prevent Griffith Williams from overhearing a sardonic laugh from the retreating Israel.

That person’s face was serious enough a moment after, as he reflected on all that had been done and said in so momentous an interview.

Presently he stopped at a house, one of the most conspicuous in the village for size and showi-

ness. It stood apart on a little knoll, and was reached by a road that had once belonged exclusively to it, as was still shown by the two tall stone gate pillars, without gates, between which the road passed.

A large garden surrounded the house, where fruit, flowers, and vegetables were inextricably intermingled; and seemed after long and arduous contests, in which all weaklings had been killed off, to have come to a kind of treaty of peace, founded upon the fact that each had benefited in some part of the place by the law of the strongest.

But it was not for this the garden was famous through the neighbourhood, but for the distorted monstrosities into which some naturally fine evergreens had been trained by the perverse art of the gardener. Animals were imitated with a kind of grotesque success; also columns, pinnacles, and vases—some of which appeared above the wall, to the edification of all passers-by.

Perhaps the greatest oddity was a large round table of growing box, placed before a real garden seat, and looking so solid on its greenish-yellow

surface that you might fancy it capable of all the uses of a table, till you placed your hand upon it and found how hollow was the pretence.

Such were the horticultural recreations that had for many years occupied the busy and unquiet mind of Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams, after her separation from her husband, who had always been liberal to her in money matters.

The garden was but a foretaste of the house, with which it was in a kind of ugly harmony. It was filled with curiosities from every clime. The crews of the vessels that trade from this neighbourhood in coals and minerals with all parts of the world knew well where to take an extraordinary shell ; a stuffed nondescript, that might have been in life either a fish or an animal ; a Hindoo god ; a talking parrot ; a Chinese oak, three feet high, bearing acorns, which however refused to be kept alive by Mrs. Jehoshaphat's ministrations ; shark's teeth ; a baby Egyptian mummy ; a cage of love birds ;—all these things, and others of the same kind innumerable, were welcome to old Mrs. Williams ; who, however, would have them at her own price, which was sometimes absurdly low, but

who on the whole paid liberally enough for her fancies.

It was a risky thing for a stranger to wander much about the principal room of reception, between the live valuables, that might any moment attack you, and the dead valuables and other curiosities, that you were every instant in danger of upsetting.

But of all the curiosities of the place, the mistress herself was the greatest curiosity.

She was of low origin, and had once actually worked in the mine under all the influences that accompanied such degrading female labour.

But her vigorous intellect and unstained character protected her ; and commended her to the Overman, Jehosophat Williams, who offered marriage and was accepted.

Too late, Jehoshaphat found that, though his wealth raised him to an equality with his rich neighbours, nothing he could do would persuade the latter to invite his wife to their houses.

He hated her from that time—and did not conceal his hate—and so separation became inevitable.

And thus her whole life led to the perversion of tastes and activities that ought to have made her a comfort to herself and a blessing to others. Having no acknowledged duties or responsibilities ; no friends or acquaintances ; separated from her husband ; being unable, through bodily infirmity, to seek health of mind and body in an out-of-door life ; having no deep inner religious faith or fixed moral principle to elevate or guide her ; the very strength of her mind and character, and the easy pecuniary circumstances she enjoyed (her husband having engaged to pay her five hundred a year when they separated), all tended to make her eccentric, morbid, and find pleasure in habits which, under more natural circumstances, she would have been the first to condemn and loathe.

Upon her, as upon Israel, the question of the mine had come as one of new life. They met frequently about it, at first without any kind of concealment, and on matters that were of no particular moment to any but themselves. But when Israel found her so much interested in the mine, he opened to her the same view of a bril-

liant future that he had suggested to Mr. Griffith Williams ; and thus by the time he had grown sick of the hesitation and weakness of the one, he found the other ripe to take the place which he soon made for her.

All their later meetings and discussions had been at night, and had been so skilfully disguised, that Griffith Williams had not the least suspicion of them till he found himself face to face with their results.

Never had the aged lady looked with so little interest upon her curiosities as now, on this morning, when she is expecting, with all the anxiety of an unaccustomed and ardent speculator, Israel's return to her with the news of his success or failure as to the proposed purchase.

This is one of her ailing days, and she is in bed. But she doesn't mind receiving company on such occasions ! She will even do no inconsiderable portion of her toilet before visitors—Israel for instance—who certainly cares as little about the matter as herself. From her bed, which is disposed expressly for that purpose, she can see far down the valley, and thus she saw Israel

at last, coming up the hill, and rated him in her heart for his slowness and impassiveness.

‘Does nothing ever move him out of himself, I wonder?’ she says irritably. ‘Why can’t he either shake his head, or give a joyous wave of his hat? Look now at his face. Who could guess which way things have gone? Ah! I understand—nothing is settled. And it is I who am an old fool to be so eager!’

Then she remembered her nightcap, and threw that off, and tossed over her grey hairs and her shoulders a brightly variegated shawl, drew the bed-clothes round her, and waited; evidently troubling no further about her personal appearance.

When Israel entered the room, he attempted something like a genial smile, and at once placed before her the completed agreement, and the guarantee he had received from Mr. Griffith Williams, which, without any kind of reserve, authorised him to conclude the bargain for the sale of the mine; and which, therefore, he had concluded.

‘All settled? Everything made quite safe? Are you sure he can’t go back?’ demanded the

old woman, almost breathless with eagerness and desire.

‘If you had seen his face when I produced the complete agreement, and told him the money was in the bank, you wouldn’t ask that. He *was* going to tear it up, but bethought him in time he had better not.’

‘Well done, Israel! Well done! And now for your reward,’ said Mrs. Williams, settling herself in her easy-chair.

‘Ay; now for my reward!’ responded Israel.

‘Well; I suppose it’s a question of salary and position—eh?’

‘And pray, ma’am,’ was Israel’s somewhat evasive answer, ‘what may you think about those matters?’

‘That I shall be liberal—liberal, Israel, and have done with the subject—I hate bargaining! Don’t you?’

‘That depends,’ remarked Israel, whose eye seemed to glitter in the dark corner where he was, with light and significance.

‘True,’ said the old lady laughing; ‘that’s true. I propose, then, three hundred a year.’

She paused and waited, as if expecting some show of pleasure or gratitude.

‘That’s fair,’ said Israel; but the tone would have been just as suitable if he had said that’s unfair. ‘And about the power, ma’am?’

‘Well, you know I can’t manage the mine myself; but I may help by advice.’

‘Of course, then, you share the responsibility of accidents, and so on?’

‘I! Is the man mad? What do I pay you for but to keep me safe?’

‘That’s what I thought, ma’am, but mines are like wives, and can’t afford two husbands.’

The joke, such as it was, tickled the old lady’s fancy hugely; she laughed till she brought on her cough, and when they settled again to business, Israel had that which he strove for—undivided power in the ordinary management.

‘And is that all? Are you now satisfied?’

‘All? Satisfied?’ Did Mrs. Jehoshaphat ever forget the look Israel fixed upon her, in answer to this very natural question; a look that made her truly believe for the moment she had, however unintentionally, committed upon him some atro-

cious wrong. 'Why, Mrs. Jehoshaphat, what about my share? Haven't I earned it honestly?'

'Share! Earned! Here! Dick! DICK! DICK! I say!' She screamed out the last of her three calls at the very top of her cracked voice, and presently came lumbering in the youth with whom the reader made acquaintance in an early chapter.

He did not seem alarmed nor excited, but simply stood and stared, with stupid, half-sleepy eyes, first at his mistress, then at Israel, and finding no response, began to yawn, and heave his shoulders, and look round as if used to such summonses, and was already meditating a retreat.

'Dick, you dolt, open your eyes and see if this man's a maniac. You can shoulder a pitchfork, I suppose, to protect me, can't you? Why, Dick, the man wants me to give him my property! Wants a great slice out of the mine!'

Therewith she began to laugh, till again stopped by her enemy the cough.

'Have you done, ma'am, with Dick?' asked the imperturbable Israel.

'Don't know,' responded the old lady, eyeing

Israel with a look where interest, almost admiration, seemed to contend with suspicion and fear.

‘Well, ma’am, we can call him again, you know.’

Mrs. Jehoshaphat turned her head away. When she again turned, Israel was leading the gaping rustic out by the ear through the door. He did not resist, but fixed his eyes in a kind of horror and stupendous wonder immovably upon Israel’s face till he was shut out.

‘I think, ma’am, you agreed with me that if the mine couldn’t be got for less than twenty-two thousand pounds, it would be worth taking at that price?’

‘But you’ve settled that—and got it for fifteen.’

‘I think, ma’am, too, you afterwards said you would even stretch a point, and go to five hundred more? That’s my case, ma’am.’

‘The man’s gone clean out of his senses, and forgets he has but just given me the agreement for fifteen thousand pounds only.’

‘Now, ma’am, I shan’t trouble you much longer, nor with many more words. Twenty-two thousand five hundred pounds is the value you set

upon the mine ; suppose we call that three shares of seven thousand five hundred each. You take two, for which you have paid the money, and I take one—my own—ay, honestly mine ; for did I not save it out of the bargain ?’

‘ And have you any document, letter, or witness to prove any kind of right ?’

‘ No ; only you yourself, ma’am. But then I believe in you.’

‘ Oh, you believe in me, do you ?’ screamed the old lady.

‘ Yes, because you are a sensible woman, a strong woman, and can understand the mine would just ruin you—if you were left to it without me—under all its dangers, and the need there is for doing a deal directly.’

Then, after a pause, Israel told her the whole story in detail of Mr. Barrett’s discharge in consequence of the discovery about the maps ; and made her plainly understand no living man but himself had the knowledge requisite for safely and profitably working the mine.

Mrs. Jehoshaphat’s face showed how thoroughly she was enlightened now. She gazed on Israel

haughtily, defyingly, passionately ; but if his features had been of iron they could not have shown less sensitiveness to her searching looks.

‘ And this is you, Israel, is it? The man I so trusted? ’

‘ No, ma’am, it’s only a part of me—as you shall find if you do right by me. I will be a faithful servant to the concern—a faithful partner to you, but only on these terms.’

‘ And if I refuse? ’

‘ Then I take myself and my plans off, and try my fate elsewhere.’

‘ After all these years? ’

‘ Ay,’ said Israel, and for the first time his voice seemed to thrill with emotion. ‘ Ay, after all these years! That will be hard lines, ma’am ; but don’t deceive yourself, I shall go, unless——’

‘ And then,’ suddenly burst out the old woman, ‘ Griffith may dispute the sale, and my money be locked up, and I be ruined!’

‘ He can’t—he shan’t dispute the sale, whether I go or stay,’ said Israel ; ‘ I have nailed him fast. He can move nohow against us except to his own

injury. He'll try to-morrow to get off the commission, but——'

'Commission! Commission from him besides!'

'Why not?'

'How much?'

'Five per cent, ma'am.'

'How much is that?'

'Seven hundred and fifty pounds!'

'Seven hundred and what?' screamed Mrs. Jehoshaphat.

'His money, ma'am, not yours!'

'Israel, I am beat—dead beat. You're a deal too much for me. Get ready your papers as partner, and I will sign them, and try you.'

'Try me? No, ma'am, trust me. That's the word. No man ever did really trust me, in things where it was right he should trust me, and was deceived. The world fights for place and money and power, and I fight too. I never once told Mr. Griffith Williams to look for any other help, or for any other bargain from me than exactly that which he got. Ask him, ma'am, if that be true.'

‘Do you want a memorandum at once, or will you take my word?’

‘I’d like the memorandum, but——’ here he hesitated a moment. ‘No, ma’am : say again that one-third of the mine belongs to me, and I’ll wait the lawyer’s time.’

‘I’m a great fool, I suppose ;—I must be—but there—Israel, there’s something about you I like, and I shan’t let you or your wife be in doubt. Write me a few lines. Go there to the table. There’s pen and ink somewhere about. Ha, monster!’ she suddenly shrieked out, as a cry of pain reached her from her favourite pug ; ‘you have trodden on my dog!’

‘Beg pardon, ma’am, I’m sure.’

Israel for the first time grew confused, as he saw the cringing creature at his feet, and he stooped to pat it with as much of tenderness as was possible to him, but received so vicious a snap of his fingers as made the old lady laugh heartily, and brought back Israel’s stony look.

The document was written and signed, and within five minutes Israel was again in the open

air, hardly knowing for the moment which way he was going, unable to think of anything but the tremendous fact—here was he, the boy who had slaved as the collier's drudge, then as the collier, then as the Deputy, then as the Overman, suddenly emerging from the darkness and squalor of so many years into the brightness and glory of wealth, position, power! Yes, it was true! All true! He—Israel—was a mine-owner, was worth seven thousand five hundred pounds in mine property, which he knew to be worth far more than it cost; he had, meantime, seven hundred and fifty pounds of hard cash to go on with, and above and before all he was master in the domain where he had so long toiled, and suffered every possible humiliation.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIRST DAY OF POWER.

For the first time for many years—more even than he could remember—Israel had a sleepless night, following the day that revolutionised his fortunes.

For the first time also, after an equally long interval, did he dream, or at least do the thing nearest to dreaming that his not very imaginative nature permitted.

He gave way to the tide of emotion that flowed in upon him, while letting his thoughts sway hither and thither as they pleased, knowing how easy it was for him to bring them back, and compel them into the appointed channel.

He thought of David—his rebellious, and yet timid boy, and as he thought, somehow the lad's instincts as regarded the mine appeared less

unmanly and more deserving of attention than before; and he went so far as to speculate as to the possibilities before many years were gone of raising him to be at once a gentleman and a mine-owner—as his partner. ‘Israel Mort and Son,’ he thought would sound well some day.

He thought also of his wife; but that kind of thinking was too much out of his way for him to dwell long on it. She was asleep, but he woke her, to ask,

‘Do you think old Simon would take twenty pounds a year for that house and garden?’

‘Yes. But nobody seems inclined to make him an offer.’

‘As soon as you have had your breakfast, go to him and say if he will I think I can find him a tenant.’

‘Very well.’

Again silence. The wife rose and began to dress. And, again, Israel spake after a little while:—

‘Barrett has left the neighbourhood and gone far away into Scotland. He has let his house, but hasn’t managed to dispose of his furniture, which would cost too much to remove. Set somebody

—not yourself, mind, for Barrett hates me—set somebody, I say, to find out the lowest he will take.’

‘I happen to know, for I have been all over it with a neighbour.’

‘How much?’

‘Sixty pounds.’

‘Sixty! H’m! Let me see.’ And Israel, whose memory was prodigious, who forgot nothing he cared to remember, but would sometimes remark almost plaintively, he also forgot nothing of things he would be only too glad to forget, began to run through the furniture item by item, and value each as he went on. ‘Too cheap! Something wrong. No. I see. He can’t help himself. No market here. So like a sensible man, he accepts the inevitable. Buy it.’

‘Buy it, Israel!’ echoed Mrs. Mort in wonder, almost alarm.

‘I said buy it! If they doubt you, refer to me, or to Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams.’

‘For you! for us!’ faltered the unhappy woman, as if overpowered by these symptoms of coming prosperity.

‘For us!’ said Israel. ‘Pray attend. Get the house as cheap as you can. Buy the furniture for the price asked. Remove from here as quick as possible. Putting both lots together, the new house should be decently well filled. But I authorise you to lay out, to the extent of twenty pounds more, to bring all things to a kind of level; also I authorise you to lay out ten pounds for yourself in clothes, ten pounds for me in linen and things; the tailor I’ll see to; and as to David, we’ll look to him afterwards.’

‘Oh, Israel, Israel, Israel, has all this come honestly about?’

‘Woman, dare you suspect otherwise? But there, I ought not to be surprised. You’ll find all right. Do you believe me?’ he demanded, looking her sternly, yet openly in the face.

‘Yes, yes; I do now! I do.’

As soon as she had gone downstairs Israel rose. His first care, when dressed, was to go to a little table where he was often accustomed to sit and write, and go over business matters connected with the mine, when the one living-room below was occupied with the preparations for the

meal. Taking his memorandum-book from his pocket, he wrote in it as follows, in a bold large handwriting :—

‘June 1, 18—. This day, at the age of 49, after forty-three years of hard labour, and wages beginning at 5s. a week, and ending at 30s. a week, I begin life afresh, manager at 300*l.* a year; with no debts, and cash in hand (commission) 750*l.*, and Mine-Owner to the extent of a third share, valued at 7,500*l.* I write this down, in order that when I look back, say after ten or a dozen years, I may see whether I have made as good use of the advantages of this position, as I have made of the disadvantages of my old one.

‘I say certainly I ought. I am strong, hardly ever ill. I time now my pulse beating seventy beats a minute, each one full, with not a bit of hurry or jumping; just the pulse to let a man go anywhere and do anything that’s in his nature to do. Thanks be to God. ‘ISRAEL MORT.’

He read this after writing it, then paused with a strange look of dissatisfaction, yet also of something

higher, better, softening, and improving his features that was impossible to define. Then he took his pen, and was about to strike out the last four words he had written, and in fact he did cross with a line of erasure half the word 'Thanks' before he stopped to reflect.

He seemed puzzled that he had written thus—puzzled to remember that the words had dropped unconsciously from him; for he knew well how little he had been accustomed to ascribe anything to a higher power; and believed that people all about him, who did this sort of thing, did it either from motives of hypocrisy, or from the intellectual weakness that makes the bulk of us accept as implicitly true whatever we are told.

But on reflection Israel could not discover that he had ever precisely determined either that God did not exist, or that existing, His relations with men might not from time to time be calculated to call forth a grateful acknowledgment from them. In fact, Israel began to suspect he had only looked at God, through the weaknesses, follies, and selfishnesses of his fellow-men; and in looking had found the latter so engross him that his vision had

failed of their final solemn quest, and so he had remained spiritually dark as ever.

He must look to this by-and-by. Meantime he would let the sentence stand.

A voice at this moment ascended from below, calling him. He went down and found the night-deputy there, Rees Thomas.

The deputy looked sad, yet resolute, as if conscious he had come upon an unhappy errand.

‘Israel Mort, I must deal fairly with thee, so I tell thee I went last night to ask Mr. Griffith Williams to interpose between thee and me in this matter of saying prayers before beginning work at the mine.’

‘Ay, as usual, going wrong in one thing leads pretty quick to going wrong in another,’ replied Israel sharply, yet as if not quite forgetting his own recent movement against Mr. Barrett. ‘And what did he say?’

‘That he had ceased to be owner, and that I had better go to Mrs. Jehoshaphat Williams, to whom it now belongs.’

‘Not entirely, Rees Thomas. I have a little share in the job.’

‘You! A share! You! partner!’

‘Ay, does the idea seem ridiculous?’

‘On the contrary, I know no man better fitted for nor more deserving of such good fortune except in the one thing needful, which lacking, all else is worthless.’

‘Now, Rees Thomas, this is my first day of power, and I have neither time nor thoughts to spare except for useful things. Do you apologise for disobedience to orders?’

‘No,’ responded the deputy firmly, yet closing his eyes as in pain.

‘Think well. You know not what I intend.’

The deputy gazed eagerly in Israel’s face, as if new light had broken upon him.

‘Do you mean that if I apologise—and my Father in Heaven knows how heartily I could do that if only I can see my way honestly; but I will honestly, Israel, try—if that be all, I will try—Do *you* mean that then you will yourself sanction—’

Something in this speech jarred upon the hearer; he relapsed into his old imperiousness of command, and, whatever his thoughts or purposes, he simply said, and with his ordinary harshness of voice—

‘Rees Thomas, if you come here to question me the sooner you go again the better. Apologise and take the situation of Overman, which I will make one unusually profitable for you—or take notice to leave this day month.’

‘And may I the while do what I am called to?’

‘No!’ thundered Israel, his patience utterly exhausted.

‘Farewell, then! I wish you no evil; on the contrary, I wish you every true good. Israel Mort, I have felt strangely inclined towards thee many, many times. I have thought about thee—I have prayed for thee—I have asked God if He would not do what I could not, make thee a chosen vessel for His glory. Thou hast gifts that might make thee a leader among men, but thou pervertest them; and I now tell thee, that until thou changest, heart and soul, and listenest to the words that have been spoken to us all, but specially to thee and such as thee, I say, unless thou bendest thy stiffened neck, and causeth the hardness of thy heart to melt, thou never wilt, never shalt, enter into the kingdom of heaven that thou dost not seek, or into the kingdom of earth that

thou dost seek. Farewell! I go not again into the mine, but will seek my bread where else it may be found. James Lusty and John Lewis can do all between them that is needed till thou findest a Deputy to suit thee. They have promised that. Farewell!’

Israel made no response, but gazed sternly and bitterly at the retreating figure; which paused at the threshold and looked back, as if still hoping for some change, but seeing none, went out, and closed the door very softly after him.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

A STORY OF THE MINE

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE' 'HIRELL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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ISRAEL MORT.



CHAPTER I.

ISRAEL IN THE ARENA; GRIFFITH LOOKING ON.

EXACT to his word Israel presented himself next day at the Farm to demand his commission money.

But he had scarcely entered within the exterior gate when he heard Griffith Williams call out loudly from the terrace above,

‘There are thieves here! Shsh, Keeper! At ’em!’

Israel glanced round, looking for a place of safety, or for means of defence.

Close by his feet was a piece of ornamental rock work. Could he detach from it a manageable weapon?

In his younger days one of his favourite sports had been that of betting on his superior strength of hand and arm. He would often challenge men seemingly more powerful than himself to a contest, where he undertook to lift on one hand above his head as much as his competitors could lift with both hands to the same position.

Grasping now the likeliest-looking piece, he drew it forth by sheer strength from the mortar in which it was so firmly bedded, and waited with it ready.

In an instant Israel found himself face to face with the Squire's favourite dog ; a mastiff of rare beauty and strength : and still more remarkable for the contrast between his gentleness when at rest, and his ferocity when roused by his master's voice to attack.

Israel stood still, leaning backwards, seemingly as impassive as the death that might here lie in wait for him. His concentrated attitude ; with the left arm against the breast, the bent fingers ready for the clutch ; the right with the piece of rock poised at the level of his shoulder ; expectant ; might have been a study for a sculptor, of vigo-

rous, wily, feline strength; and of stern, calculated courage, and purpose.

The dog sprang, but at almost the same moment the armed hand shot out with resistless force and unerring aim at the creature's head, striking a terrific blow; meant, however, more to guard their owner, and to stop, perhaps stun, the mastiff, than with any expectation of disabling him.

Israel then sprang aside, as conscious of—and to evade—the unspent impetus of the attack. But the dog slipped, fell—how he had no leisure to consider. All he could think of, and all that Griffith Williams, standing on the terrace above, saw, was the dog pinned to the ground, his throat in the iron grasp of a hand, which evidently was squeezing all breath and life out of him, while the other hand battered the creature's head with the rock.

‘Rascal!’ shouted Griffith Williams. ‘Let the dog go. Do you hear?’

But seeing that Israel paid no sort of attention to him, and that he was killing the animal he so much valued, inch by inch, minute by minute, by sheer force of strangulation, (using now both hands

for that purpose,) and in an almost awful silence, he called to his other dogs, forgetting they were shut up—called for his servants, and, getting no immediate reply, ran for his gun.

By the time he had got it, and felt it, and realised the danger of the temptation he was running into, he had taken second thoughts, so he put it back; and then ran along the terrace and down the short flight of steps to confront Israel, and see if he could yet save his dog.

He found the pair still in the same position, except that Israel had sunk on to one knee during the terrible struggle, the better to retain that unrelaxing, remorseless grasp on which his very life, he felt, depended.

Never for a moment had he allowed eye, or thought, or will, to diverge from that brute antagonist. But now, aware of footsteps behind, he turned his head half round, saw the dog's owner, looked again at the dog, who was panting, exhausted, all but motionless at last; then he rose again slowly to his feet, still retaining his hold and his bent posture, then he let go, and jumped suddenly and swiftly upon the dog with the whole weight of his body, whose entrails burst forth.

And then he turned, 'cool as a cucumber,' to use his own phrase in speaking of David's cheeks, in the first chapter of this narrative, and said breathlessly,

'A fine dog, that, Mr. Griffith Williams! I am glad it wasn't mine, for I should miss him.'

Griffith Williams looked from the shocking picture of his dog—who was not dead, but moaned helplessly as if asking to be allowed to die—to Israel's face; then said, almost below his breath, unconscious awe and respect modifying his intense hate,

'Are you man or devil?'

'That's as people use me.'

'What do you want here?'

'Want? I thought gentlemen generally paid respect to appointments.'

'I made no appointment.'

'No; but I take people as I find 'em, and knowing your ways I made one for you yesterday, as you know very well.'

'What do you want?' savagely demanded Griffith Williams.

'Seven hundred and fifty pounds for commission on the sale of the mine.'

‘ And if I refuse ? ’

‘ You can’t.’

‘ Can’t, eh ! ’ And therewith the Squire broke out into a prolonged and very loud laugh.

‘ You can’t,’ reiterated Israel.

‘ Why ? ’

‘ I should have thought, sir, your own interest and comfort would have told you why. But since they don’t, perhaps you will be good enough to listen to my notions. You are an educated gentleman ; I am only an ignorant collier. Excuse me, then, if I put things a bit roughly while making them plain.’

‘ If you reflect without anger or prejudice on all that has passed, you will see—you can’t help it—that at the beginning I advised you for the best ; that I acted in a prompt, straight forrard manner, and that I needed only to be met in the same way, for all to have gone right between us. But what happened ? First you were eager, hot upon the whole business, then all of a sudden you grow cool ; you see lions in every bush where I never yet seed anything bigger than a hare ——.’

‘ Hark ye, Israel. Be content to have robbed

me. Don't add insult lest ——.' Griffith Williams' face showed with what difficulty he had refrained thus far from using violence.

'You see, Mr. Williams, I haven't such a vocabulary of choice words to choose from as you have, nor such skill in selecting only the amiablest thoughts wherewith to do one's business. I aint a student of human natur'.'

'D—n you! How much longer do you mean to annoy me? Will you go?'

'Presently. Where was I? Oh, I reck'lect! Well, sir, when I found I couldn't move you on nohow, nor see no certain end of any kind, I did begin to speckilate on my own account; and when once I begin things I generally goes on with them, as I did with you, by the shortest road to the most sartin end. What's the consequence? Why, that whereas I should have had with you some hundreds a year, and no more—though all the same I'd been a faithful and contented servant —'

'That's a lie,' roared Griffith.

'No; it's true—for a time. I'd been contented for a reasonable time, but now being obligated to take another path—one I didn't want at first to go

into—what's the result? Why I have all you meant to give me, and I'm owner of a third of the mine into the bargain.'

'Owner! A third of the mine!' almost gasped Griffith.

'My own arnin'! My own honest arnin'! You agreed to sell for fifteen thousand pounds; Mrs. Jehoshaphat agreed to give twenty-two thousand five hundred pounds, which, as you will see on reckoning, left me seven thousand five hundred pounds, or a third.'

'And you have the hardihood to come here and tell me this to my face?'

'Why not?'

'Why not? My God, what a scoundrel! Israel, you may perhaps take it as a compliment, but I really don't know whether your impudence or your infamy most strikes me.'

'“Infamy” and “scoundrel” are actionable words, Mr. Griffith.'

'I am delighted to hear it, and you may rely upon it, *Mr. Mort*, that I shall give you the opportunity of obtaining any number of witnesses.

For that which I call you now, I will proclaim you to the world—a truly infamous scoundrel.’

‘Well,’ remarked Israel, after a pause, ‘I suppose we must agree to differ about what you will do in that, as we differ as to what you will do in this matter of the commission.’

‘Yes; and when I pay you that, you may expect me to be silent about the other. Good morning, Mr. Mort.’

‘Good morning, Mr. Griffith Williams. I am sorry you should put yourself to fresh expenses, but, of course, if you do, you’ll own as a gentleman I wasn’t to blame, because I warned you.’

CHAPTER II.

ILLUSTRATING AN OLD PROBLEM.

NEXT day Griffith received a lawyer's letter repeating Israel's demand ; and signed—Keppel North.

The day after, this was answered by Griffith's solicitor, Mr. Spettigue, requesting, in most polite terms, a meeting.

The two men of law met. The agreement was shown. It was confessed by Griffith's own adviser that he had not a leg to stand on, and that there could only be a general laugh at his expense if the matter became public.

‘The neatest thing I ever saw done in the course of a longish life,’ said that gentleman, with subdued enjoyment. ‘But he's deaf to all reason.’

‘Do you mean he refuses to complete the sale?’ asked Mr. North.

‘No ; he yields to that. He sees resistance to be hopeless.’

‘But refuses the commission?’

‘He does, absolutely.’

‘Then my orders are not to lose an hour, or a chance, but to proceed regardless of cost.’

‘You mean that, Mr. North?’

‘Israel Mort means it! If you knew the man, I should need say no more. Well, I am sorry for all I see that will grow out of this business, but if war is meant it’s no use calling it peace. So good morning.’

‘Stay! Can’t we compromise? I am willing to take some risk.’

‘You mean act first, and consult your client afterwards.’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, suppose I tell you that I did put the idea of meeting you half way to Israel only an hour ago.’

‘And he said —’ queried Mr. Spettigue.

‘If I took a single sixpence less than the whole demand, he should look to me for the payment of that sixpence.’

‘Dear me ! dear me ! My client won’t move, and yours will make him. It reminds one of the pretty antique problem—What will happen when irresistible force comes into contact with immovable strength?’

Both laughed, and beneath the laugh both saw what must be the end ; which, however, it was not easy for one of the gentlemen to accept.

‘I shall lose my client, even if I get back my money,’ said Mr. Spettigue.

‘I think not,’ said the other, ‘for your client is one of those men, I judge, who *will* make mistakes, and must pay for them, but doing so would like still to have somebody else to blame. Your shoulders are broad, and can bear.’ The other laughed as he rejoined,

‘My own thoughts run so much in that same direction, that I think I shall settle it. I almost think I shall.’

The other said nothing, for he felt silence was best. And so after a little fussing about, seeking papers, calling in a clerk to attend to things that demanded immediate attention, stirring the fire, and making remarks about the weather—all of

which were perfectly understood to be but so many opportunities for turning the whole subject over a second time before making an irrevocable decision—Mr. Spettigue sat down to his writing-table, drew forth his cheque book, and presently gave Israel's adviser the whole sum demanded.

‘Come now,’ said the latter, when he had pocketed the valuable document, ‘you don’t mean to say you really have no authority for doing this?’

‘Well, one doesn’t care to be thought a fool in the profession, even though that might balance and modify the being so often thought a rogue out of it, so I will tell you. When I had argued the matter out with him, and had come away to act upon his policy, he came after me, and said, “Mind, if you do yield to such an infamous demand, I don’t say I won’t repay you, but I shall always declare that I never consented to it.”’

The lawyers looked at each other significantly, laughed and separated.

CHAPTER III.

ACTION FOR LIBEL.

JUST one month and a day later, the same lawyers met again on business connected with the same clients.

Griffith Williams had been as good, or as bad, as his word, in spite of the discreet warnings of his adviser, and the pleadings of his wife, who was willing to forgive and forget anything for peace. He had told everybody he met how he had been swindled by Israel's false facts, dishonest opinions, and treacherous behaviour.

Israel heard of these things during the first week, and grimly smiled to himself.

'If those laugh who win,' thought he, 'those who lose may very well be angry. People will understand all that. His railing won't hurt me.'

And at first Israel was right. The neighbour-

hood did laugh heartily with him who laughed because he had won. The ridiculousness of Griffith's position tickled everybody—he, for his own benefit, setting another man on to do a certain thing, and when the man had done it quarrelling with him, because he had done it too promptly!

But in the second week, he heard that persons whose judgment he valued, and whose favourable opinion was vital in commercial matters, began to treat the business more gravely.

In the third he went to his lawyer—the same who had brought the commission business to so happy a termination—and told him with characteristic simplicity and frankness what he had thought, and how far he had been disappointed. He ended with the question,

‘Taking the thing as I have said, and using your individual knowledge and experience as a man of the world besides, I ask you if there is anything sufficiently dangerous to carackter to demand action? I stand on my carackter, Mr. North, and no man shall damage that while I have breath in my body, or a shilling in my pocket!’

Mr. North was aware from Israel's look, voice,

and manner, he meant not merely all he said, but more, when he used these last words. There was no anger in them, but there was deliberate thought and unchanging will.

Somehow Mr. North so much respected that will, and, so much feared it for Israel's own sake if it made any mistakes, that, from a kind of sympathy with him, he replied briefly,

‘I understand. Come to me again at the end of a fortnight. We will both in the meantime observe and collect facts.’

Israel came at the time appointed—looking cheery—the lawyer fancied. He waited to hear what the latter had to say, who was hesitating, cautious, and on the whole inclined to let the affair blow over, as no doubt it would sooner or later.

‘My experience and views are different,’ was Israel's response. ‘Here are notes of things said to certain folk, and here are the names of some of them who can be trusted to repeat what they heard in a court of justice. Proceed, and quickly. He's hurting me. What money will you want?’

It will be understood now on what business the two lawyers had again met.

And for what end? Why simply to repeat in substance the former conclusion.

Griffith's adviser, Mr. Spettigue, found it alike impossible to prove that Israel had done a single dishonest act, or to resist the proofs arrayed on the opposite side, that his client had become actionable for slander and injury to character; and that heavy damages would have to come out of his pocket, if the contest had to be fought in a court of justice.

It appeared in the discussion that Griffith had given warning to his lawyer, after several long and heated interviews, that he might yield if he liked once more; but that if he did so, it would be for the last time: he would never employ him again.

'So, you see,' remarked the lawyer, with a shrug, 'I must lose my client, or go to work to ruin him by a process of endless litigation.'

If all solicitors were like these two, the profession would indeed be as honoured as honourable. They really did listen to each other, and

strive to get at fair and hopeful conclusions for both the men represented. And it made the fact all the more remarkable that they were just the two men whose interests were the most opposed. They shared between them all the best business of the district, and they lived and had their offices just opposite each other, in the market place of the principal town—Leath.

There was, however, it must be owned, at that time, a faint whisper heard occasionally—nobody knew by—or to—whom uttered, but suggesting the idea of these gentlemen's partnership : an idea which made each of the persons concerned so very angry when it reached him through inquisitive lips, that no one presumed again to touch upon it.

Meantime in their dealings with Griffith and Israel, they fought stoutly, and yielded fairly, for their respective clients, or would have done so but that, as Mr. Spettigue observed, plaintively,

‘My client gives me so little chance to ask you to yield fairly ; he is once more hopelessly wrong.’

‘Well, I will take no advantage of your candour. I have as yet said nothing to Israel about this, but I shall on my own responsibility waive all

claim for damages or costs if you, on behalf of Mr. Griffith Williams, consent to put into my hands a paper to the effect that, differences having arisen, and charges having been made, we have gone into the matter as friends, rather than as legal advisers of both these gentlemen, and have come to the conclusion that the charges are not substantiated, and are, therefore, withdrawn. This paper to be shown to any one we please, but not made public in any other way.'

'He must do that! He shall, or find somebody else to act for him.'

The paper was drawn up, a copy made, and away went Mr. Spettigue in one direction to find Griffith Williams, while Mr. North went off in the other to seek Israel.

It was noticeable, the conduct of the two men. Content with obtaining substantial redress, Israel signed at once without a word the paper put before him. Whereas Griffith Williams the moment he read the document tore it into a hundred pieces, and scattered them upon the wind, that it might carry them where it listed.

'There!' he said, looking unutterable things at

the faithless negotiator ; and walked away without condescending a second word.

Just as Mr. Spettigue expected, he received in a few hours a note fawningly polite from one of the pettifoggers of the profession, desiring, at Mr. Griffith Williams' request, that all papers, securities, documents, and valuables of whatever kind he held, belonging to that gentleman, might be immediately forwarded to the writer, George Croft. He was invited also to enclose his account, which should be immediately settled.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Spettigue, breathing a deep breath, ‘the Squire’s got the right man at last to run him at the devil’s own pace down into the bottomless pit.’

CHAPTER IV.

CONFESSION OR DAMAGES?

ISRAEL heard with perfect equanimity of the failure of the proposal made on his behalf, and merely said to Mr. North,

‘As I expected. Proceed!’

An action for slander was accordingly begun, and the damages were laid at a thousand pounds.

Mr. Croft was certain all would end rightly. It was a question of money only. Witnesses were expensive articles. This idea was hinted in a somewhat mysterious manner that made Mr. Griffith Williams uncomfortable, but when he asked questions it was explained away.

So matters proceeded to the day of trial: when an accidental conversation with an old Quaker friend, a Mr. Sturch, who happened to be tolerably familiar with the facts on both sides, so alarmed

the Squire about the antecedents of some of Mr. Croft's witnesses, and for the aspect his own character, as a supposed man of honour and a magistrate, might be made to bear in the court, that he agreed, if the compromise he had before rejected were offered now, he would accept it. He would himself propose nothing. Self-respect forbade. He reminded his friend the costs were now considerable, and these he supposed he must pay.

His friend, the Quaker, warned him against supposing he would get off so easily; and waiting no reply went to seek Israel, who was in the mine; pursuing his labours as though, in the comparison, actions-at-law and courts of justice were hardly worth a thought.

The broad-brimmed friend was chivalrous enough to go down to him to save time, though sharing all Griffith Williams' disgust of the descent and of that to which it led.

He found Israel too busy to speak to him for a few minutes, and with hands and face blacker than any one had ever seen him even in his Overman days. If he was hard to David, he was at all events still

more obdurate to himself. Proprietor as he now was he had been busily engaged for some hours with picked men in the very delicate and dangerous operation of propping with new supports a weak place in the roof, he himself foremost in the labour and the risk through the whole operation.

‘I think that’ll do as a temporary thing, Lewis,’ he said, looking at the work, and then at the man addressed.

‘I wouldn’t trust it for long. There’ll be a Fall here for certain, if you do.’

‘We begin the general renovation in a week or two, so if it’ll only last till then—’

He noticed his Quaker friend’s anxious face, but before going to him he looked again at the work, and then he and Lewis put up yet another prop.

And then he went to his visitor, declining to shake hands, and holding up one hand in explanation to be seen, while with the other he lifted the lamp. Mr. Sturch laughed ; then said,

‘Have you any hostile feeling to gratify in this trial ?’

Israel did not answer for quite half a minute. No doubt he was taking in all the question

implied. He looked on the ground, and his face seemed to grow blacker than usual in the deep shade.

‘No ;’ he said at last, lifting his clear steely eyes, which shone in the lamp-light, to the querist’s face. ‘Set my carackter fair before men, and I’m content.’

‘You will make no money demands?’

‘No, it would be unwise,’ said Israel, deliberately. ‘I shall gain most by taking least.’

‘You are perfectly right,’ said the Quaker, shaking Israel’s hand warmly, and forgetting or disregarding how dirty it was. ‘Those who were in doubt, will doubt you no longer, when they hear you are so moderate. I don’t want to come down again. Where will you be in three or four hours?’

‘I will follow you presently to the court.’

Mr. Sturch once more returned to Griffith, found him wavering, and on the whole inclined to let the trial go on. The case, he said, was expected to be called in a few minutes.

‘Come with me,’ said the Quaker, ‘and I will show you something.’

He took him into the court, and they passed on

their way a number of men and women, with Mr. Croft in their centre, busily engaged in conversation with one or two of the number.

‘Look at these. They are your witnesses.’

Griffith did look, and could not but own he had never seen a more villanous, disreputable-looking set. Not a single decent person of known respectability could he recognise among them.

‘These, I suppose, are to prove somehow or other a deep-laid plot on Mort’s part to swindle you out of the mine—a conspiracy with only one man to conspire. Now glance further ahead. Note the way I look. You see that knot of persons, known, nearly every man of them, to you and to me as men of credit, and mostly men of substance. These are Israel’s witnesses. And consider, my friend, how easy a task they have—merely to repeat what you have said to them, what you still say if any temptation incites you to speak. Let us go outside.’

Griffith was convinced, yielded, and signed the document that was virtually, if pushed home against him, a confession of slander; and that document lay henceforward in the hands of his detested enemy.

CHAPTER V.

DAVID SEEKS ROSES, AND FINDS THORNS.

It need hardly be said that Griffith Williams hated Israel a thousand times worse than before, when he heard men praise his foe's behaviour as magnanimous—as Christian-like in letting the Squire off so easily.

From that moment his whole nature assumed new and darker tints. He thirsted for vengeance, and he thirsted the more because it seemed so far out of his reach.

An unexpected incident, while opening to his heated vision prospects of future trouble, gave him the opportunity he sought sooner than he had ventured to hope for it.

He was walking one Sunday afternoon in the little wood of Brynnant, believing he was seeking shade and shelter from the intense heat and oppressive

glare of the open sunshine, but in reality trying to escape from the eyes of men, who seemed to look on him so differently—with so little of the old confidence and respect. But the wood gave him more than this. At that hour it was deserted; and as his morbid thoughts found their only solace in solitude, he could here freely give way to the self-communion which had become a part of their habitual life.

The world, whose beauty had been so dear to him, had become hateful. The very air seemed impregnated with the darkness and odour and foulness of that mine which now was in part Israel's. His baleful figure would at the touch of a passing thought rise suddenly as from some petty receptacle, and soar like the genius in the 'Arabian Nights,' up, up, up, right up into the skies, and become so vast in its proportions as to shut out the very sight and feeling of the sun.

He had such a mood on him now, as he wandered about between the tree trunks, seeking rest, trying often for it by sitting down, but finding none.

He was pondering over a question that had

often occurred of late. Was it not possible to circumvent Israel yet? To beat him at his own cunning game? To buy back the mine quite unexpectedly, and then have the intense delight of explaining everything politely—oh, most politely!—to the beaten vagabond?

Griffith felt he could risk half his fortune to accomplish such a result.

But how? There he felt baffled. Mrs. Jehoshaphat was too much delighted with her bargain to be willing to sell. The mine was to her a gigantic toy; a fund of infinite amusement, for the aged woman's second but vigorous childhood; a vent for her irrepressible spirit and wayward mental energies; a solace for her decaying frame, her bodily pains, and her enfeebled and almost useless limbs.

Besides, how, even if he could buy her out, was Israel's share to be dealt with?

Angry with himself for yielding to these delusive notions, which he felt to be utterly unreal, he began to cut away furiously the luxuriant tops of a fine crop of stinging nettles; and in so doing stung himself, a fact he recognised with a

heartily curse on all things past, present, or future, divine or human.

At that moment his attention was arrested by a peculiar whistle, though why he noticed it he might have been puzzled to explain.

Presently it was repeated, and seemed to come nearer.

He could not help fancying it was a signal of some kind, and he grew curious to see if he was right. Anything, no matter how trivial, was welcome to him just then, for it drew his thoughts away from themes that did him, as he knew, nothing but injury.

A third time and still nearer was the same clear, penetrating, inquiring sound heard ; and then as by way of answer came from behind him a prolonged cry in the shrillest and sweetest of fairy voices of ‘ Da-a-a-a-vid ! ’ followed by ringing delicious laughter.

The blood rushed into Griffith’s face, and suffused his very eyes, as he turned and saw his own darling little Nest with a basket of flowers advancing towards him who whistled, as if the signal was for her, and it was she who had answered it.

He stepped behind a bush, hoping she had not seen him, and, as he did so, saw a boy—no doubt David—advancing rapidly towards where Nest was.

As the lad came near, Griffith's jealous eyes could not but notice how well he looked. His mother had evidently got some special idea into her head about him ; for she had managed to get him a Sunday suit made so superior in point of taste and style to anything known in the village that the neighbours were sure she must have gone to Leath for it ; and not to Leath only, but to Leath's most fashionable and expensive tailor.

Whether the lad felt, as boys will feel, elated by this novelty in his condition, or whether he saw it only through Nest's eyes, and, therefore, gloried in it ; or whether the idea of meeting her, added to the sense of the sweetness of the holiday, and of the supreme beauty of the weather—whether any or all of these things together moved him or no, it is certain that his face was a picture of such glowing beauty and expectant delight, as he passed the bush, and met Nest, that Griffith Williams felt softened for a moment towards him, and almost envied Israel his pride in such a son.

Then recalling how he had seen David in the mine under such ignoble circumstances, he used the fact to illustrate the general badness of Israel's heart and character, and to stimulate all his hatred anew ; and when once that feeling obtained full possession of him, all other and better feelings faded for the moment, even if they did not disappear altogether.

‘Nest, you darling little thing, where have you been?’ cried David. ‘I have been whistling like a blackbird for you, I don’t know how long.’

‘Why you see, David, mamma said she was sorry she had promised to let me bring you some flowers. She was sure papa would be angry. And then I cried. And she wanted to pacify me by saying that some day things might be different, but now I mustn’t mind ; I must be good, and all that. But, David, I wasn’t good, and so she let me come. But I must run away directly. And you mustn’t go home with me.’

‘Shan’t I though, but I shall.’

He took the basket of flowers from her hand, and, after some minutes of pretty contention on

both sides, they took hands, and were about to stroll away together, but not towards home.

No. David had found the first white wild roses of the year in bloom, and he must show her where, and make a garland for her.

Poor children ! The change that came over their faces as they suddenly saw standing before them, at a turn of their path, the awful figure of Mr. Griffith Williams was such as might have moved the hardest heart, much less the heart of a man like the Squire, which was not naturally at all hard.

But he was in the early stage of a moral disease, when natural things become unnatural to the jaundiced eyes. One maddening thought alone now possessed him, that already his wife was preparing a scorpion's nest for him in his own future home ; that she and doubtless Mrs. Mort were in accord, and had between them settled that David and his daughter—*his!*—were to be early initiated in the thought of a future alliance.

Well, he would settle that once for all ; and meantime cursed the folly of his wife.

The children trembled as they saw his look,

and the riding-whip in his hand, but seemed unable to speak.

He strode towards them quietly enough, till he was able to place his hand on David's shoulder, and grasp it as in a vice.

‘Put down those flowers,’ he said.

‘Please, sir,’ said David, falteringly, but as loth to give up Nest's gift, ‘she gave them to me.’

‘Put them down,’ thundered Griffith.

‘Do, David, dear!’ said the innocent Nest, but using words that were as oil to the fire in her father's breast.

A sudden lash was the only other warning given, followed by a scream from David, and another from Nest. And the father's passion once given way to, raged without check or remorse. Again and again, and yet again he struck the boy; and no one could have guessed how long he might have gone on, but for the sight of his own child at his feet, clasping his knees, and exhibiting such distress in tears, sobs, and passionate outcries, that he at last paused, and threw away the whip, as he said to David,

‘There, my lad! Whenever, your whole life

through, you think again of my daughter, think of this and be wise.'

He then stooped, took Nest up in his arms, but found he had in those few moments virtually changed for her and himself all the sweet loving confidence both had so much prized.

She would say nothing to him. She dried her eyes in a little time, though it was a long while before the convulsive heavings of the little breast could also subside. She leaned upon his shoulder, but it was from exhaustion. He felt through his whole frame as if some new spirit of revulsion had been born out of all this anguish; and though he strove to justify himself to his own conscience, he seemed to be unable to listen to it—he heard only the silent pleadings of his little daughter against him—which seemed to go up to heaven.

Should he say something to David, whom he had not looked at since the violence done him? After all the boy was but a boy, and had doubtless been put up to this by the arts of a low mother, and by the subtle ambition of a wicked father.

When he did turn to see what the boy was doing, he found David had gone away.

To carry the story home, of course ! Israel's son, the new manager and mine-owner's son, had been horsewhipped. Here was new material for the gossips.

Somehow Griffith felt sick. Do what he would, his thoughts would go to the helpless boy—not to the boy's father, for whose sake the violence had been committed.

His wife ! What would she say ? She had better say nothing. Why, after all, it was to her senseless folly the outrage—if it was one—was due.

Whatever comfort this circumstance was calculated to give, failed, however, to convince Griffith Williams he had not done a most barbarous act ; and he went home more profoundly humiliated, more deplorably wretched than he had ever before been in his whole life.

That day he felt would make its mark upon him for evermore.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW DAVID PLAYED THE SPARTAN BOY.

FOR some days Griffith Williams was left in a curious state of suspense, hourly expecting to see Israel again clamorous, about the outrage on David ; or else some legal or other messenger from him, probably bringing a summons to appear before a brother magistrate.

They were by no means enviable days with such a prospect before him of new troubles, more bitter personal humiliations. Besides, he found it impossible to shut out the fact that matters were, as a whole, growing worse and worse. The tone of his daily life was becoming embittered, his self-respect consciously lessening. Yet, instead of being thereby warned to stop, he felt impelled more vehemently than ever to go on till he had routed and eternally disgraced this mean yet dangerous enemy. And then—why then, perhaps,

he might forgive and forget in time, and let the peace of oblivion and contempt reign betwixt them.

Colouring these thoughts with its own peculiar sinister light came every now and then over them the idea that Israel's prolonged silence about the horsewhipping might mean fresh plots, more serious dangers. It was quite out of the question that he could intend to be silent, and to let such a thing pass. What, then, was he—what could he be contemplating?

But the remarkable part of the affair was that nobody seemed to know anything about the incident beyond the limits of his own household, and there it was only known to Nest and her mother.

He never took up a local newspaper but he expected to see a paragraph with some sensational heading, and in the middle of it his own and Israel Mort's names in portentous capital letters. But the Press seemed as indifferent to David's horsewhipping as all the rest of the world; unless, indeed, out of respect to him they were determined to be silent till compelled to speak as a matter of ordinary duty.

It never occurred to him till an entire week had gone to ask whether it was probable or possible that the boy had kept the affair secret.

Griffith had not credited him with so much good sense, as that of desiring to conceal so disgraceful a punishment. But at last he began seriously to believe the fact was so, and his opinion of David sensibly changed and improved.

The lad, he thought, must have the courage of a pretty strong self-control, if he could help telling those who would so surely have sympathised with him. And as usual with Griffith, when compelled to think better of those he quarrelled with, he was also compelled to think worse of himself. As David's behaviour grew less criminal in his eyes, the punishment he had inflicted became less satisfactory to him who had been at once witness, jury, judge, and executioner, and the implied disgrace at times almost threatened to recoil on its author.

He was sorry he had allowed himself to be tempted into violence. Still it might do the boy good. If he didn't mistake, there was a touch of his father's obstinacy visible through all the timidity and gentleness of his behaviour when he

hesitated so about putting down the flowers. So all might be for the best. The incident might warn him against experiments at a later time, when he could neither get off so easily as regards punishment, nor be able with so little effort to disentangle his own misplaced affections. That lad, as a man, would be a dangerous lover. Happily Griffith was warned. And so was David.

And then the matter gradually died out of his mind.

But not so out of the minds of others. David had not told Israel, but resolved even in the most cruel anguish of his hurts he never should be told. But his heart failed him of its purpose to conceal the matter also from his mother. He opened the door, biting his lips to keep his mouth shut. But as he shut the door and went in, nature became paramount, and the intended secret burst forth amid a passion of tears, his face crimson and dark with shame.

The mother's first impulse was to rush out and seek the assailant. And when David, seeing her so moved, quieted her by quieting himself, even then the poor, spiritless, broken-down woman was

stirred to such new life by the sight of the livid purple weals across her boy's loins as she undressed him, and applied some soothing lotion to the sores, that she wanted to go and seek Israel, and not even wait for his return at the ordinary hour.

David soon convinced her that for everybody's sake it would be best to say nothing. Nest would like that, he was sure. So would Mrs. Griffith, who was always very kind to him. And as to himself, the idea of the public knowing what had happened, was too dreadful even to be thought of.

'I am a great coward, mother,' said David. 'I shrieked when he first struck me, but I do think I could let him lash me again, very badly, if only he promised to tell no one. It was Nest's being there that hurt me most. And that,' said the boy, with sudden violence—and yet with tears streaming down his cheeks—'that I'll never forgive him, never!'

As to Israel, they could take no counsel from him. Both instinctively shrank in horror from the mere thought. They knew well that, however little he might be able to sympathise with David's sufferings and sensitiveness, he would feel

that the greatest possible outrage had been committed upon him—Israel himself, and that the measures he might take in consequence would destroy every chance of future reconciliation.

While David was yet shrinking with the acute pain at every touch of his mother's careful, but not exactly skilful hand, there came a soft knock at the door.

‘Cover me up, mother. Oh, don't, don't let anybody see or know!’

David did not for the moment feel sure that it was not Nest outside.

While Mrs. Mort hastily strove to obey him, the door was gently opened; and, to the astonishment of both, Mrs. Griffith Williams stood on the threshold.

David was too far undressed to be able to follow his first impulse—to run away upstairs; so he drew around him hurriedly and shamefacedly the garment nearest to his hand—his little jacket—but his mother pulled it away, and courtesying with a strange mingling of respect and defiance, and her pale face visibly reddening, said, as she pointed to David's back,

‘Oh, please come in, ma’am, and see your husband’s doings! Look at him! Look at my boy’s back!’ And therewith she began to cry.

‘Oh, my dear good David!’ cried out, with impetuous heart, the Squire’s wife; as she put her arms round him and kissed him, remaining quite unaware of the torture she was inflicting on David; while he, coward as he said he was, bore these pangs heroically, and smiled, as he in response clasped his arms round her neck, and kissed her, and said,

‘Oh, it don’t matter! Please tell Nest I don’t care a bit about it now—no, not a bit!’

Mrs. Griffith Williams again kissed him, and said,

‘I could not rest till I had seen you and your mother, and told you how grieved I am, and how wretched my little darling is. In fact, to tell the truth, it is she has almost driven me here, unknown to her father. She’s such a sensitive child, Mrs. Mort. I’m often afraid I shall never rear her. She’s quite ill now, and her father is in much trouble about her, and many things besides. But there, I mustn’t begin talking—about things, too, that he says I don’t understand.

But that's nonsense! For if one doesn't understand at my age, I wonder when I shall! I must run back now. I wouldn't for the world have Griffith know I am out.'

She had left David's side a little, but returned now, and whispered to him,

'My darling was so hurt about the flowers, that I promised to bring you one. There it is, a yellow rose. Now kiss me. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs. Mort. Only a little secret betwixt David and me. You are to ask no questions, mind.'

Mrs. Mort could only respond in a similar spirit. And with mutual expressions of hope in some future and brighter day to come, when something good might happen, the nature of which neither appeared to like to speak of, or in any way to define, they separated.

As to David, vain indeed would be the attempt to picture his delight as he held Nest's gift—the beauteous rose—in his fingers, and smelt it, and turned it round, and studied it in every possible aspect, and wondered if there ever had been such a flower in existence before.

But now arose a new difficulty. The boy was obviously unfit to go to work next morning. Yet how tell Israel so? David's whole system was shaken. He needed rest, freedom from aught that might still further inflame his sores, and constant attention to alleviate them. The mine was just about the very worst place in the whole world the lad could go to under such circumstances; and the mere thought of David's working in it, with all its inevitable bodily difficulties of motion—its stoopings, and crawlings, and unnatural postures, made his mother shiver, and cry out,

‘No, David, that mustn't be thought of! But then what shall be said to your father? If I tell him you are unwell, and think of some naturally sufficient excuse, he won't take my word for it, nor will he rest till he has found us out; and then he'll say we are deceiving him, and be very hard on us.’

David thought, and winced, and thought again, and once more winced; then remembered his rose, which had been already deposited in a slender phial filled with water, and placed within his reach. He smelt at that, and made up his mind.

‘I shall go to the mine to-morrow, mother.’

‘No, no, David.’

‘Mother, I shall go.’

And he went.

In one aspect of the matter it was a pity Israel did not, at the close of that trying day for poor David, know the truth ; for to a certainty he would have been moved, and perhaps for the first time in his life, into active sympathy with and better understanding of his son. For here one of Israel’s little secrets may be let out. It was, then, one of his objects, in dealing so sternly with David, to wring out of him those weak elements in his character which with Israel were such objects of contempt ; namely, the lad’s sensitiveness and gentleness, which had something feminine in them, and the ulterior uses or value of which Israel knew nothing, guessed nothing.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. JEHOSEPHAT'S CORDIAL.

THERE was one person who wonderfully enjoyed these differences between Israel and his former employer—however unpleasant they might be to the parties themselves—and that was Mrs. Jehosephat.

It was as good as a play, she more than once told the former, to have him come and sit by her bed-side, and narrate every incident, however slight, and as far as possible repeat every word that had been said.

He had to show his wound—for Israel had hurt his hand against the dog's teeth, through the force of the blow; he had to repeat what this lawyer had said, and what that one had answered. He had to tell how Griffith looked at certain critical moments, and how the two men faced one another when they next met, and so on.

And then came the trophies of the double victory. She exulted at the sight of the cheque for 750*l.*, which she made him bring for her to see before he opened his account with it at the Leath Bank. She was still more deeply gratified when, at a later day, she read the memorandum Griffith Williams had been obliged to give, unsaying all his bitter charges that he had cast broadside through the neighbourhood.

‘I say, Israel Mort,’ she almost shouted out to him, after the perusal of this document, her eyes gleaming with humour and delight, ‘you are a very dangerous man to have dealings with! Very. I don’t think I am quite safe. Do you? You have done me once, you know, and in the same transaction that has put out our friend the Squire so much. Perhaps I ought to have joined with him in the attack on you. Assailed at once in the van and the rear, and on both flanks, where would you have been? Eh?’

‘I ain’t time, ma’am,’ was Israel’s response, ‘for fighting with imaginary difficulties. It’s hard work enough, I assure you, to deal with the real ones—I mean the mine, which is in an awful state. How

Mr. Jehoshaphat managed to sleep at nights for thinking of it, passes me.'

'Why shouldn't he? You slept of nights, didn't you? and you were always in far greater danger than he, who seldom went below. He was too good a judge!'

'Miners, ma'am, carry their lives in their hands so long, they forget at last they have 'em there. But the property at stake, that's what he cared for, and what I was thinking of. I suppose, however, he had extracted so much from the pit during his long term, that he could at last feel content, whatever happened. Let the mine blow up, or let the water burst in, it didn't matter to him. Mr. Jehoshaphat had taken jolly good care for himself.'

'I'm afraid you are right, Israel. And now that Mr. Jehoshaphat's dynasty is no more, and that Mrs. Jehoshaphat's and Mr. Israel Mort's begins, how are things going on?'

'We ain't done much yet. There's so much to prepare first. Making contracts, collecting workmen from different parts, getting materials together. I am buying the materials all at the

cheapest markets. I reckon to save some hundreds in that item alone, over and above what your husband used to pay.'

'You do! Well, if you beat him in anything, there's only one other person for you to beat.'

'You, ma'am?'

'I! Good lord, no! The evil one!'

The implied compliment, however, did not escape the lady, whose genial spirits almost began to infect Israel.

'You are very busy, then, at the mine even now?' she asked.

'Busy! Come and have a look at it. I wish you would.'

'Israel, man, that's the one thing on earth just now I seem to care for. But the doctor says, "No, I sha'nt." He's a horrible despot; and, as to language, pays me, I suppose, in my own coin. Says it might be dangerous. I can't tell. He's always croaking about my being so careless. Careless!—after I have let him shut me up here, like a mouse in a trap, in this one room, for I don't know how many weeks!'

‘Do your mind good, ma’am, to go, and that often is the way to do good to the body!’

‘Don’t say anything to him or anybody else, but tell me, how it can be managed? Quick! tell me!’

The difficulty was this: Mrs. Jehoshaphat had now removed, with such of her curiosities as she could take with her, to her late husband’s residence, which was perched like an eagle’s nest on the edge of a precipitous height that overlooked a magnificent expanse of sea, marshy plain, and mountainous range: a prospect she was quite able to appreciate. From the windows she could see the mine—about half-a-mile distant—and the inaccessibility of the residence mattered nothing to one who had no lady visitors, and who rarely went out.

‘How did you get up here?’ asked Israel.

‘By a carriage, with stones stuck under the wheel at every yard or two of the worst places, to prevent slipping back. But I’ll never trust myself so again. The steep was frightful!’

‘Well, ma’am, suppose a chair were got from the town. I’d find a couple of men who’d draw you

nicely, and where they couldn't draw you would carry you as softly and as safely as if you were a new-born babe.'

'Ha, ha, ha! That's what I fear I am—at least, what I'm coming to, having already reached my second childhood. But what's the value of life if you don't enjoy it? Give me now only three years stuffed full, daily, of interesting things to see, to hear of, or to talk about; let me know the mine is repaired and at full work—hundreds of people earning a good living for themselves, and making lots of money for us—let me see all that, Israel, and you doing me credit for trusting you—ah! let me have that—and I'll ask no more.' So spake Mrs. Jehoshaphat; and at the conclusion smacked her lips, as with enjoyment of the taste left on them by her words.

She had risen in bed from her recumbent posture, while her eyes were glowing with wild excitement, and her grey hair in tangled masses was falling about her withered neck, and over her half uncovered breast.

Presently she became conscious of this personal disorder, covered herself, and leaned back; and

said with an air of sudden lassitude that contrasted painfully with what Israel had witnessed just before,

‘When shall I come?’

‘We will have all ready for you on Thursday next. The chair and the men shall be with you about eleven in the morning. I’d advise you to bring plenty of wraps, though the weather is warm, and a good stout cordial in a bottle.’

‘Perhaps, perhaps! The cordial for me, Israel, is to see a man at work like you. A real man! There! be off, or you’ll fancy I’m waiting for the death of Mrs. Mort to ask you to marry me.’

A burst of laughter, soon changed into a cough, then again a fresh burst of mirth, were the last sounds Israel heard as he left his eccentric mistress.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FAILURE CONFESSED.

ISRAEL was in all the bustle of the new works when one day there appeared before him the figure of a man he had often thought of since the day of their separation with some regret, but more of annoyance.

Rees Thomas walked into the office looking so thin and physically wretched, yet with such a light in his eye—as though that saw something unseen by others—and with so much of simple unaffected dignity in his bearing, that Israel was interested in spite of himself and the resentment he felt and waited to show, if need be.

‘I have been very unfortunate, Mr. Mort,’ he began, ‘since I left you.’

He paused, and Israel got up and placed a chair for him, and bade him sit down; then waited in

silence, checking the reply that sprang to his lips asking, Why, then, hadn't he had more sense, and have stayed where he was?

‘Employers, to be candid, seem not only to share your objections, Mr. Mort, about the morning prayers, but to object to me besides for only having proposed such things.’

‘Did you tell them, then?’ asked Israel.

‘Certainly. I could do no other while seeking the post of Deputy or Overman.’

‘You mean you would not waive for them that which you refused to me?’

‘Yes.’

‘Well, that's right, Rees Thomas; that's right.’

‘Failing as Deputy or Overman, they, for the reason I have given, refused even to employ me as a simple collier! The word seems to have been passed round that I am dangerous, because I try to do a little good in my own humble way as a follower of Christ.’

‘You mean in mere talk between man and man, as opportunity serves, not collecting them formally together and interrupting labour?’

‘Yes.’

‘Fools! I don’t object to that. Though I fear many of my men would fancy they had got a scapegoat in you to carry off all their sins, and so sin away harder than ever.’

Israel laughed, but, seeing his hearer did not, immediately relapsed into his ordinary iron-clad sort of visage.

‘Will you, then, employ me as a simple collier?’ said Rees Thomas, after a pause of sadness produced by Israel’s jest.

‘Is not the work too hard for you? You are not naturally robust, and have been long an under-officer; and I fear that for you to return to the continuous and monotonous labour of coal-cutting ——’

‘Let me try,’ interrupted Rees Thomas earnestly. ‘I will earn my wages, or go without them.’

‘So be it.’

‘I am sincerely indebted to you, Mr. Mort. God only knows what I should have done had you rejected me. I am at the lowest stage at which Fortune can place a man; another step, and I must have fallen into the abyss.’

‘Your mind is unchanged as to the offer I before

made you? I could yet make an opening as Deputy at thirty shillings a week, and valuable perquisites.'

'It is kind of you to ask me, it is magnanimous, but it is you who must change in that, not me.'

'Go, then. Begin as soon as you like,' said Israel, roughly, and turned away to continue his previous avocation.

CHAPTER IX.

REES THOMAS IN A NEW LIGHT.

THOUGH of so demonstrative a nature in all that concerned his mission (for Rees Thomas, while one of the humblest of men, believed he had a mission), in all other matters he was shy, reticent, and inclined to glide shadow-like through the world, with as little of notice as possible. He was especially unwilling at all times to speak of himself, his troubles, or his poverty.

None, therefore, knew, and few even could suspect a circumstance that gave ten-fold intensity to what he was now suffering on account of his poverty and physical weakness. He was in love, and beloved by one of the most attractive of women in that class of which alone he had any personal experience.

Margaret Doubleday was the daughter of the

old woman with whom Rees Thomas had lodged for many years, except when temporarily away from the neighbourhood. These two had comforted him at the very beginning of their acquaintance by giving him a home when he was out of employment, sharing with him their exceedingly limited means, till Fortune smiled again, and work and wages were renewed once more.

Then Rees Thomas brought them week after week every sixpence he earned, leaving himself nothing for those little indulgences which we all so much covet; and even going without fresh and warmer clothing that the season made necessary, in his determination to pay his debt to them without a moment's avoidable delay.

That matter, however, they then took into their own hands, and placed one evening ready for him on his chair, when he should sit down to the evening meal, a thick warm overcoat of the precise kind he needed and liked.

The tears came into his eyes when he saw what they had done; and, for a wonder, he did not reproach them, as they expected, with the reminder of how much he yet owed them. He put it on

before them, felt it, examined the pockets, stowed away in them all his small tools and conveniences of various kinds that he, like all thoughtful miners, carried ; then looked at himself in the glass with such evident satisfaction, and patted his sides so complacently, that the delighted women hardly knew whether to laugh or cry, so did both at once. From that hour perhaps might be dated the beginning of the love affair.

Margaret had previously seen in Rees Thomas only two aspects, that of the serious, sad, not to say depressed workman ; and that of the energetic minister of Christ—his mind full of vivid religious light, his heart brimming over with religious tenderness, but the lofty tenderness of his Divine Master, which never forgot in its care for humanity what it was aiming to accomplish.

She had felt with him, as we have seen, in the one aspect, but only as a sister might feel ; she admired, venerated, feared him in the other ; so deeply indeed that to think of loving him, or of imagining he could descend from such spiritual heights to think of her in any other way than as a disciple, was quite beyond her.

Rees Thomas, on his part, with his thoughts habitually pre-occupied by the intense desire to do some good, however humble—for he was a man of no personal ambition, seemed to lack indeed some useful quality in that direction—never thought of her but as one towards whom he owed whatever of grateful brotherly affection and of spiritual ‘suit and service’ he could render.

And if he had thought of her for an instant as a possible wife for him, he had certainly shrunk back in dismay at his own egotism and folly. What!—she, young, strikingly engaging in her person and manners—sure, therefore, to have offers from men enjoying all those advantages of person and pecuniary position that he lacked—she marry him, the poor collier; for he was not even then a Deputy! Absurd! Wrong even to think of. He would take care he would think of it no more.

And he kept to his purpose for a little while, until this incident of the coat took place; which, trivial in itself, revealed him to her in just that aspect of simple genial humanity, which alone she needed to encourage and stimulate her liking into a warmer sentiment.

From that moment a change went on almost unconsciously to both. She would venture to ask him questions on sublunary topics, to tell him of matters that had interested her in the people, or things about her, and find to her gratification that he, instead of regarding her talk as trifling, responded with similar but richer experiences from his own daily life ; and became quite animated in such discourse, while delighting her with his touches of character, and his keen perceptions of their humorous side, to which she had fancied him inaccessible.

Then, too, she found how richly his mind was stored with just the knowledge she had fancied him most destitute of, the practical things of daily life.

She found, too, that his tastes and natural habits all led in exactly the direction to which she had fancied he was most opposed—home and domestic comfort. That very smallest of worlds—the family—was exactly the one world wherein all his merely personal desires and ambition were limited.

He brought books home and read to her. And

these were so judiciously selected, so adapted to her unliterary experience, that while they never wearied her, they always left behind in her remembrance some seeds of culture that promised in time an unexpected harvest.

Still neither for a moment thought of love.

Now it sometimes happens that love is wayward enough to prefer such a state of things, and to grow only the faster and more robust in consequence; either because it is thus left alone to its own natural impulses and laws, free from a thousand conventional taints and restraints, or because it gets a certain sly enjoyment out of the sight of two people pretending each to be moving in a certain direction, the one opposed to the other, whereas all the while they can't move a hair's breadth from the line that is leading fast to the fatal goal where they are to be shorn as with the scissors of the weird sisters of their single threads of life, and receive, instead, a double and mingled strand.

But discovery came at last. And discovery itself is at once the greatest charm of love, and the most powerful of influences in stimulating it to new zest, ardour, and strength.

So was it with Rees Thomas and Margaret.

The maiden was simply confused, but very happy at the discovery.

The man felt happy, too—so happy that it seemed wrong; and then he took that as a warning that he was forgetting the dearest aim of his life, his most sacred duty, and began to withdraw himself.

Thus for some little time the atmosphere of their humble dwelling was one full of the strangest lights and shades; faithfully reflecting the hopes and fears, the conflicts of duty with passion, that possessed the hearts and minds of the two actors therein.

And it was just at this critical period that Rees Thomas thought to solve the very serious problem presented to him by a kind of compromise shaped out in his own secret thoughts, to the effect that, before he spoke to Margaret, and so, perhaps, committed them both to what could not be again undone, he would feel he had achieved something for his Divine Master, that might excuse, if not justify, his worldly falling off.

Hence his determined efforts to establish prayers

in the mine as the fit preliminary to such daily work; hence his quarrel with Israel, his separation from him, his efforts to carry out his aims elsewhere, his utter and melancholy failure, and final return to drink the cup of anguish, disappointment, and humiliation to the very dregs by resigning Margaret, and once more casting in his lot with Israel.

He did resign her, and in so stern a manner—one she had not conceived it in his power to use—that poor Margaret, scarcely able to keep back her tears, yet felt called upon to display her womanly pride; and when her mother strove to speak to her about the business, answered her with a quite unusual asperity and irritation.

And so all three were silenced.

CHAPTER X.

A FALL, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

REES THOMAS has been some days at work ; and Margaret sees that on each recurring eve he comes back more weary than ever, faintly smiling away questions about himself, refusing offers to help, and retiring as soon as possible, after his meal, to the solitude, though not the rest, of his bed-chamber.

There is no more pleasant gossip now between them, no more reading, and Margaret finds life hard to bear, and is inclined bitterly to ask why he could not have left her alone before awakening in her such new hopes and aspirations, rather than after.

Still he goes on with the labour that is killing him. Let us follow him on a day that was to bring him face to face with yet a new aspect of destiny.

He was at work in a stall that opened from the engine-plane, or incline, monotonously hewing away, and almost as monotonously repeating what had become a sort of hourly formula of utterance with him.

‘No ; men like me have no business to wed !’

The morning had been chilly, and the face of the coal where he was working not being very far from the shaft-bottom, he felt little of the high temperature that affects the industry of the miners in the deeper recesses of the pit. He had, therefore, retained his jacket.

Feeling warmer now, he rose to take it off, and was placing it on the top of a wall, when he became aware of a sudden check in the wind-draught.

This is always a more or less alarming circumstance, as it may mean a great Fall somewhere, that has interrupted the ventilation, and which may soon be followed by explosions, through the gas accumulating where it should have been dispersed and carried away ; or it may mean that the greater danger of an explosion has happened.

He could not even guess at the precise point

where the check occurred, nor at the magnitude of the affair.

A man working as much as a mile away may know of even a slight explosion, through such a check to the wind, if he be in the same current.

While he stood listening in suspense and fear, not so much for himself as for others, the colliers who had been working near drew towards him, as if with an instinctive faith in his mining knowledge, whatever they might think of him as a spiritual comforter, if danger or death were nigh.

‘It is a Fall!’ cried one. ‘I knew it must come! I knew it months ago!’

‘No,’ said a second; ‘it’s an explosion, and we shall soon be meeting the choke-damp! Hadn’t we better run?’

‘Let us first see which way to run,’ answered Rees Thomas, ‘lest we run into the danger we wish to escape.’

‘I know what it is,’ said still a third; ‘it’s an inundation. The waters are breaking in upon us, and have filled up the seven foot dip, so that no air gets that way.’

A man came running towards them, and shouting as he ran, 'The roof has fallen in the No. Five level, and there's been an explosion since, and more are expected. Run for your lives!'

He turned, and they were all about to follow him, holding their lamps so as to give them all possible aid, when before they had advanced many yards, the lights grew dim, their breathing difficult, and they all as by one impulse stopped.

'We must go back,' called out Rees Thomas. 'Be calm, dear brethren, and all shall be well!'

Returning to the place where they were before, Rees Thomas snatched at his jacket, in which he had things that might prove of infinite value if wanted. He called to them to follow him.

He forgot now he was a simple collier, and he spoke with all the decision of one in authority.

Presently they reached in safety the main drift, where the air was still passable, and where they were in assured safety for the time.

But reflection came with all its bitterness. They had gone further away than they were before from the bottom of the shaft; and they knew there was a double barrier betwixt them and that place

of safety and deliverance, the Fall, and the unbreathable air.

But Rees Thomas's soul was full of anxious inquiry as to the fate of the many men who were at work in different parts of the pit.

He thought of individual persons, with whom he had had sweet religious communion ; he thought of others who had sorely tried him by their ribald jests and hostility to his every effort among their companions, and he hardly knew as to which class he felt more anxious to learn if they had escaped ; or if that darkness, to which the darkness of the mine is as nought, had come over them, and set their spirits free to join in hope or fear their Maker and Judge.

It was with the sense of receiving a great shock that he thought just then of David.

But if he needed any more powerful incentives than he already had, the thoughts of the lad, and his danger, and of the possibility of saving him, gave them to him.

They now heard groans, and a cry, and Rees Thomas advanced as far as he dared in the direction of the sound. Presently he returned

with a collier, who had crawled from the Fall through the darkness and the foul air, his lamp smashed and useless, and his arm broken.

He had been on their side of the Fall, and, happily so far for him, only just on its outskirts.

He feared, he said, that many men had been injured, and that more had perished.

Time passed, though none could tell how fast or how slow.

It seemed after a while to Rees Thomas that the mass of fallen matter that choked the way must have been penetrated by the manual efforts of people on the other side of the Fall, between it and the shaft, or else that the Fall itself had not yet come to its natural end, and that anyhow fresh air was beginning to pass through.

Inexpressible was the comfort this thought and belief gave to the imprisoned men.

Still in spite of repeated efforts they found it impracticable to reach the Fall by the proper route, and it became a question whether they should not try another, a circuitous one.

But that, objected one of the colliers, would, he

thought, carry them where the explosion had been.

‘All the better,’ responded Rees Thomas; ‘if only we *can* go that way, for then we may find some of our men needing succour.’

So they went. There were seven of the party in all. They soon came upon the first tokens of the battle-field. Doors, trams, roadways in a state of utter wreck.

But they could go no further for the choke-damp, and the men were about to lie down, feeling at once despondent and inclined to sleep.

But Rees Thomas roused them with a voice like a clarion.

They must put up canvas doors to guide the wind, and the ventilation would be restored at once.

One collier, the most willing and able of the set, ran to fetch canvas, which lay at no great distance ready cut in squares.

Others collected tools, and made such preparations as they could. In half an hour the wind was got right.

Again they advanced, and were soon met by a

party, who, having no lights, but seeing the lights of the others, called aloud. Rees Thomas answered also aloud :—

‘Do I hear James Lusty’s voice?’

‘Ay, ay, Rees Thomas; ahl right, wind and limb!’

‘And the men with you?’

‘Ahl right too.’

‘How many?’

‘Thirteen?’

‘God be praised!’ was the silent ejaculation of the collier-minister, as he reckoned the number of the two batches together now known to be safe.

By this time they had met; and as the first gang held up their lamps to look at the new-comers, they saw they had been struggling through water, that their faces and hands were bleeding, and their clothing and entire aspect showing the ordeal they must have passed through.

Lusty was faint, in spite of his being so cheery, and he insisted upon sitting down to drink the cordial draught of tea Rees Thomas poured out for him into a little leathern cup he carried.

The latter knew well had he given Lusty the can he would have drained the whole to the bottom, regardless of the wants of others.

While they rested, the story of Lusty and his party was told by one and another in interjections, with pauses between.

One man had heard a sound of explosion, but guessed it to be only a shot fired.

But Lusty himself heard nothing, guessed nothing, till going his round he met the sulphur. He ran from it, back to the men and warned them. Then they stayed still till the sulphur again reached them, and they had once more to fly, and pass in their way through the dip, where they lost their lamps, and were knocked about sadly in the darkness and in the water.

Rees Thomas wanted now to be moving, but he was in the presence of one who would brook no inroad on his authority. Lusty was not simply a Deputy now, but Overman.

Could he be persuaded in any way to abdicate for a while?—Rees Thomas wondered to himself.

He saw Lusty was no longer master of his own

mind and will, and he understood but too plainly it was through no fault of his own.

All the well-known effects of the air in that state known as choke-damp were upon him. His craving to lie down, his failing power of limb, the fading away of everything like energy or will—from all these he was suffering; and though he more than once responded to Rees Thomas's impassioned appeal to him to exert himself, to struggle—for that he would probably die if he did not, the effort was feeble, and came to nothing, and he slept.

The next half hour was the saddest of the day, and precisely because attended by no incident, because there was nothing to do but to suffer, to fear the worst, and to wait in cruel suspense.

One by one the lights of the lamps began to give out.

‘Well,’ said a voice, after a long and deep pause and heavy silence, ‘I’m glad of one thing, whatever happens!’

‘What’s that?’ asked Rees Thomas, not unwilling to have the awful stillness broken.

‘That you, Rees Thomas, persuaded me to join

a benefit society, and my poor wife and children will have a decent sum to help 'em on, if this is to be the last of me!'

A heart-breaking groan burst from another collier, revealing without words what he who uttered it felt, as knowing that his dear ones were left without any such provision.

Rees Thomas thought the time had come to pray, and he told them so, saying they would understand why he had delayed, that they might not think they were to be praying when they should be working.

There were emphatic responses from many, and silence on the part of the rest.

Rees Thomas then offered up a fervent but short prayer of thankfulness, that so many precious lives had been spared, and of entreaty that all the rest might yet be gathered together safely.

But he knew well how much reason there was to expect that some, perhaps many lives had been, or would be lost; and, like a man who could be prudent even in his most fervent passion, he took care to say, and with deep significance of tone,

that it was not their will, but God's that was to be done.

A deep hum of Amens comforted him with the assurance he had comforted them.

Lusty now awoke, and his words and entire behaviour showed he was suffering from hallucination of mind. He rose to his feet, looked sternly about him, and began to abuse all and sundry, for coming so late to work; and to give vent to oaths so brutal and revolting, as in his sane and wakeful hours would have shocked even himself, little sensitive as he was to such things, could he have heard them repeated.

Rees Thomas was glad when he again lay down and slept.

Seeing no particular and pressing danger to him, Rees Thomas decided to leave him there awhile, and try if he could yet find more of the inmates of the mine.

'David! David! David!' again he exclaimed to himself as he felt how all this delay might endanger him.

A fancy strangely superstitious for such a man came over him. Israel's luck had of late become

a proverb in the village. Was it now to be his luck that events so serious as a great Fall, and one or more explosions after, should happen and yet not a single life be lost?

He was constantly reminding himself 'None yet. All safe as yet. Oh, that it may prove so as we go on!'

The mere fancy, with all that it involved, seemed to act like a prophecy, and to give new strength to his failing limbs.

So again the party, now a large one, advanced; Rees Thomas in the van as before.

Some objects attract him as he approaches them in the darkness. He holds up his lamp and sees a tram overturned and lying on its side. He shifts his lamp, and the light falls on a man's recumbent figure, then on his face, which is scanned eagerly by Rees Thomas.

He stoops and feels his pulse, he holds his cheek to the lips; alas! no blood is beating in the one, no breath oozing from the other. The man is dead. And as that man had been engaged, so in all probability Rees Thomas might have been engaged, had he not resigned his post, and gone

away, and now returned in a humbler capacity; for it was his successor as Deputy that he looked upon.

He knelt down by the dead body, and prayed inaudibly for a few seconds. What of gratitude and praise he thought or did not think, none of his fellows heard then or afterwards.

That man had been one of the very bitterest of his opponents regarding the morning prayers, and had been chosen by Israel precisely for that reason.

When Rees Thomas's companions knew who it was that lay there, the first man known to be dead, perhaps also the last, there ran through the group low murmuring talk, that told but too plainly how much the new Deputy had been disliked; and how inclined they were in their present mood to look upon his fate as a judgment, that he of all men should have been willing to fill the former Deputy's place.

Had the question of morning prayers been put to the men on this melancholy occasion, when they were following their present leader and former Deputy through a veritable valley, not of the

shadow of death, but of death itself, doubtless there would have been a unanimous and earnest call for their resumption.

As they were again advancing—Rees Thomas feeling every instant as though he heard, not in his actual ears, but through his soul, the pleading voice of David crying, ‘Oh save me! save me!’—they were joined by two more men and two boys; the latter revealing a tale of horror in their hands as they held them up to the light of the one lamp that alone remained burning, and showed their fingers bleeding and denuded of flesh. And yet the fact that they were saved so far—had yet a chance for dear life, inspirited them to make light of their own sufferings, and almost to smile and draw brave comfort from the look of sympathy they saw in Rees Thomas’s countenance.

But when he heard their touching story, his sympathy changed into admiration of the courage and fortitude that had brought them through so great a peril.

They had nearly finished a job of repairing that had taken a long time to accomplish, and

were getting so weary that one of the men had said to the other,

‘Well, Tom, I’m going,’ and he began to collect and put on his clothes.

‘No, let’s finish while we are at it,’ urged the other.

Something warned the man (so he afterwards said) who had wanted to go, that he ought to stick to his purpose, but not liking to upset his comrade, he agreed to stay.

They had finished at last, and one of the two boys who had been waiting on them snatched up his clothes, and started off running; delighted, boy-like, to think he would soon be out of the pit, have his supper, and then join in a game of cricket.

Presently, while the others were preparing to follow him, they heard him cry out in sudden alarm.

Before they could get to him he came back running, and his clothes streaming down with water, to say the water was in the ‘dip,’ and he had got into it before he knew, and his foot slipped, and so he had gone down into it over head.

The two men looked at each other for a moment in blank stupor and silence.

Then one of them sat down on the ground, saying,

‘We are done now! we are dead men!’ and seemed ready to resign all hope and effort in the blackness of his despair.

‘Come, Jim,’ says the other, ‘that won’t do. Let’s fight for our lives, anyhow. Rouse thee, man. Let’s work through.’

The other shook his head, but at last rose to his feet, and taking heart of grace from the energy of his companion, who was already at work with his pick, prepared to begin also.

He was stopped by his comrade.

‘We can’t both dig; we must only make a hole big enough to go through. So while I work you rest, and while you work I’ll rest. The boys must take the coal as fast as we break it down, and put it out of our way.’

‘But they’ve no shovels, no baskets, no nothing,’ querulously said the listener.

‘They’ve fingers, hands, and jackets. Now for it.’

He began striking as hard, as fast, but also as skilfully as possible, till he was in a profuse sweat, and his strength failing.

Then he stopped, and the other, without a moment's intermission, pursued the work.

And so they went on hour after hour.

The boys meanwhile scraped the coal together with their hands, and ran away with it the moment they had got enough to fill the cavity of their jackets.

No wonder if their fingers soon became raw, but they went on unflinchingly.

And at last, after a lengthened period of dreadful exertion, and still more dreadful suspense and anxiety, they had got through, and were able to reach and stand before Rees Thomas.

A sudden, but faint and distant explosion now spread new alarm through the mass of colliers, and before there was time to speak to them, or arrest their footsteps, as they were running hither and thither, it was followed by another explosion, nearer and far more terrible.

Rees Thomas and a man who had stayed near him, moved by his secret but truly unconscious faith that to be near one so good was almost like

a promise of salvation, went to a man-hole near, that happily was big enough to give them partial shelter; and there stooping low as a precaution they heard the burst of an awful thunder-clap, followed by a great hurricane sweeping like a messenger of ruin through the mine.

In an instant they were lifted out like mere playthings for the tempest, and thrown down in the middle of the roadway, both for the moment stupefied.

But Rees Thomas recovered himself almost instantly; and, while his companion lay still senseless, saw or seemed to see the rolling of the flames—rolling now like the waves of the sea when the lurid light of a burning ship is on them, and now like a snowstorm—to and fro on the varying currents of the wind seeking a way out, and exhibiting (if his eyes did not deceive him through some hallucination of the brain) bright and beautiful colours, red, blue, and white; then a moment or two more, and all had passed away; darkness again reigned, and the choke-damp, as the follower of death, came to reap the fruits.

It would seem that the current of air being con-

finer kept the flames in existence unusually long. And as when they first rushed through the confined space they kept near the roof, Rees Thomas and his companion escaped injury then, but on the return of the flames, as they found no instant means of exit, they came along the bottom, and thus both the men were sadly burned.

Rees Thomas, in his anxiety about his companion, did not at first know how or where he was himself injured, beyond the fact of the pain.

A slight wind was felt at that moment, and it produced such intolerable anguish in Rees Thomas's face, that his hand went instinctively up to feel; and then he knew he was badly burnt; and his thoughts—for he was human, after all—flying towards Margaret Doubleday, he felt with the most exquisite sense of anguish he had yet ever known that henceforward he would perhaps be intolerable to her very sight.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH OR VICTORY.

HERE was a new enemy for Rees Thomas to wrestle with, if he would not be utterly overthrown and left helpless, with all these poor wandering men, lost in the deep black darkness, that stretched away from him in various directions; all needing spiritual comfort and guidance, even if he should be unable to render them material help.

He knelt and prayed, and was strengthened.

Margaret became to him once more as a star of light, beckoning to him to arise, deliver these helpless captives, and come forth with them, and have faith in her to glory in her love, rather than to shrink from him because of his misfortune.

Having with his fingers cleared his mouth of the dust which had almost choked him, he put his hand towards his pocket for his tea jack (or

can). Both jacket and tea-can had been blown away.

Again a moment of intense depression ; for even though a man, contending with his own nature, relies upon but little of comfort, he feels keenly the deprivation of that little.

But then again he cried out,

‘O my divine Lord and Master, I understand now ! I must lean on, trust to Thee alone, use that Thou hast given me. Thou wilt have me heart and soul in thy service, looking nowhere else for aid and succour. So be it. I am ready.’

And he stood there in that utter darkness, as devoted as was ever the most brave soldier on the most hopeless of missions, ready either for death or victory, calm of heart and clear of brain.

Knowing the importance of excluding the air, he tied a handkerchief carefully over his face, although the touch of the fabric was torture, and then he turned to seek his companion.

After feeling about for some time vainly, he felt the man’s shoe, and then gradually feeling along got to his shoulder.

‘Sam !’ he cried to him.

But there was no answer, except one that was more comforting than painful at that moment—a groan.

‘Sam ! speak ! are you hurt ?’

‘Ay, ay, I shan’t need to fear much more, if that’s any comfort !’

The man complained, strange to say, of a bad burn under the arms, though there was no hole in his clothing. In fact he had been in that brief moment of subjection to the tempest so knocked about, that his loose clothing must have been lifted, and hence the burn.

‘Oh, Rees Thomas,’ he said at last, as opening his over-full heart, ‘here’s a morning !’

‘It is, indeed,’ was the reply.

The ‘morning’ was nearer evening now, but the man had lost all sense of time, and remembered only it had been morning when the calamity opened upon him.

‘Rise up, there’s a good fellow,’ appealed Rees Thomas, for he was lying flat on his breast on the ground, as if he had consciously done with the world, and was seeking the one and only remaining thing, the rest of the grave.

He got up, and his first words were, to the great solace of Rees Thomas,

‘ Oh, dear Jesus ! Let us pray together, let us pray ! ’

They did both kneel down and pray, the one first thanking God they were still alive, and asking that He would keep them so, if it were His good will, the other supplementing that prayer by one for all the other men who were in the same danger.

The man then wanted to lie down again, but Rees Thomas told him sternly he must come with him.

They took hands, and moved on ; the spare hand on each side stretched out to the arm’s fullest extent to feel for the sides of the roadway, or for any unexpected obstacles.

Their feet moved nervously at each step, lest they might descend upon the yielding body of a comrade.

They did strike against some form that not long ago had had life, but it proved to be the dead body of a horse.

At that moment a piercing cry went right through Rees Thomas's soul.

It was the voice of a boy crying,

‘Mother! Oh, mother! Dear, dear mother!’

‘David, is it thee?’ rang out the collier-preacher's voice with wonderful power.

For a moment there was no reply, but quickly feet were heard coming, yet as if compelled to pause either from pain and injury, or from the difficulties of the way.

‘David, is it thee?’

There was still no answer, save such as was given by the rush upon him of David himself, his heart bursting with anguish, and yet with the sense of possible relief, as he clasped Rees Thomas round the neck, guided to him only by the voice.

After a few moments of joyful embrace, Rees Thomas made a movement to put the lad down; but whether hallucination or fright moved him it was impossible to say, but he clung to him with all the tenacity with which he could possibly cling to life itself; the two indeed seemed confused into the one and same thing.

When Rees Thomas again essayed to put him down, he found the lad's arms and legs immovable, unless he used violence. And at every touch, David began to repeat his cry of 'Oh, mother, mother!' in a voice of such irresistible pathos, that Rees Thomas knew not what to do.

The boy was not heavy, and under ordinary circumstances, and to a man of ordinary strength, the burden might have been of little consequence; here it seemed, even to Rees Thomas, intolerable.

He besought David to stand down for a moment, and he would take him up again in an easier posture, hoping that when he felt he was on firm ground, and was held between the two men, he would grow reasonable; but in the lad's half-madness there was just sufficient method for him to refuse to trust himself away from the shelter of Rees Thomas's breast.

Well, thought the latter, with a sigh, he could but make the attempt. And then he reminded himself that perhaps, after all, this strangely embarrassing incident was the only mode of securing the boy's safety.

So with that weight hanging about him, and

with a cry of pain wrung forth every now and then if he touched David in some particular part—showing he, too, was suffering from burns—the three moved on.

Presently the way was obstructed, and it was some time before they could make out in the darkness what was the obstacle.

It was a mass of trams, huddled together all of a heap, three feet high in one place—a wreck like that on a railway when two trains meet in collision.

Men were lying here, groaning, incapable of removal without fresh aid from without.

Nothing could be more strange or pathetic than the talk, the exclamations, the recognitions in the dreadful darkness.

Rees Thomas was cheered to find no one here dead, and he cheered the wounded men by promising speedy assistance, if only he could get round or through the Fall.

Three roadways met here, and the question was whether to take the main road, leading straight to the Fall, and so to the shaft, or to try one of the two more circuitous and lengthy roads—the ‘Nine Feet’ or the ‘New vein.’

As the air seemed better, and just breathable, they decided to make straight towards the Fall by the main way.

Sam's failing strength and courage were now utterly exhausted ; and on reaching other trams that had been overthrown he doggedly got into one, and refused to answer anything Rees Thomas said to him.

Resting David's form upon the tram while he made his appeal, Rees Thomas got so far relieved that he could go on.

At last the Fall was reached. The first intimation of it was the feet striking against the smaller outlying rubbish near the base.

As he moved on with anxious, uncertain footsteps, the scattered rubbish grew into small heaps, and then into bigger ones, till at last he was stopped ; and, kneeling down and stretching out his arms, felt the great slope of protruding beams and masses of rock and coal, ascending out of reach.

'Now, David,' he began ; 'listen to me. I am wearied and yet have a great labour to get through. You must help me. We have to make way over

this Fall, or find a passage through it, or stay here and die, if no one comes to our help. Which is best?’

The lad relaxed his grasp, and slid to the ground, and there sat in the mournful darkness, but retaining hold of Rees Thomas’s clothes.

Hearing his voice, a man called to him, who had also reached the Fall long hours ago, but had found it, he said, too high and too dangerous to go over; for twice he had tried, and in each instance had moved some lightly poised timbers and rock, and narrowly escaped destruction as they came down, heavily falling, past him.

‘Have you any tea about you?’ asked Rees Thomas, feeling better for the breeze that played all about them, and prepared for new efforts if only he could get something to refresh his burning throat and parched lips.

‘Yes. Here it is; take it. Drink it all, if you like, you and the young master’—for Rees Thomas had made known to the man who his companion was.

David drank, and will never as long as he lives forget what that drink was to him. It was balm

for his burns, hope substituted for despair, life begun again with all its romance and freshness, just when the boy made sure he was on the threshold of Death!

And then Rees Thomas drank, and returned the jack, still containing plenty of the liquid.

They sat there together a little while in the dense darkness, while Rees Thomas revolved in his own mind, whether in the face of the discouraging report Henry Best had given him, about the danger of trying to ascend the Fall, he had better try, too; or remain patient for a time, to see if succour came from without.

‘Has there been anything falling for some time?’ he asked.

‘No; not since when my feet brought this very timber down we are sitting on.’

‘I must try,’ said Rees Thomas, earnestly. ‘My life is in God’s hands. If I succeed, I will soon return to David and to you.’

He rose, but David clung to him, and rose too.

‘What now?’ asked Rees Thomas, somewhat sternly, though his heart bled for the seeming unkindness.

‘I can’t stay here. Let me go with you? I must! I will!’

The lad’s voice was growing passionate, frenzied. To quiet him, Rees Thomas said,

‘You shall if you will listen to me first, and know what you are doing. You heard what Henry Best said?’

‘Yes.’

‘You know, then, the danger of clambering over this immense and confusing mass of rubbish and beams of timber, with no light to guide us, no earthly power to warn us to step a hair’s breadth aside from peril, even if that hair’s breadth may be the difference between life and death? You understand that?’

‘Yes,’ whispered David, below his breath.

‘Very well, then. But mind this is no work for cowards, but for men, and boys with the hearts of men. If you do not keep entire control over yourself, you may ruin us both, even while I am opening the path to safety for us both. A sudden gesture of alarm from you may bring down upon us this grim, invisible avalanche of the nether world.’

‘I will be quiet and careful! I will, I will, indeed, dear Mr. Rees Thomas!’

‘Come then, my youthful hero, and let us see what Providence has in store for us.’

Would Henry Best go, too? He decided one way, and then another, two or three times in as many minutes, but finally refused to move. His burns, he complained, ached so bad, and he was so perished with the cold. If he could but get some brandy!

And now Rees Thomas warned David to stand behind him, on no account to move to either side, to take hold of his coat, and try by feeling with his hands, as Rees Thomas proceeded, to discover where the latter planted his steps, and so as he moved upwards to put his feet on exactly the same places.

‘Yes,’ said David, nervously.

‘Are you ready?’

‘Yes,’ again responded the boy, taking up his position.

‘Now, then, move when I move, stand still as a stone when I stand still.’

‘Yes.’

Rees Thomas then moved very slowly round the great masses of the Fall, standing still every yard or two as if listening intently for some sound of wind, or perhaps as if desirous to feel it upon his face, which was exposed on the uninjured side ; then going on again.

At last he found what he sought, a direct current of air. This he concluded came over the Fall, unless indeed it should unhappily prove to come through an opening in the pile, which was likely enough to exist, on account of the timbers and props mixed with the débris of rock and coal.

To make sure he went on till he knew he had examined every part that it was possible for him to reach, and found no other current of air so decided, so hopeful. To that spot he returned, glad to find the same wind mark the same spot, which he knew by a stone he had placed to guide him.

‘ Now, David, cheery, lad. Think of getting to father and mother—— ’

A sob interrupted him.

‘ Getting to father and mother, and telling them

how you and I led the forlorn hope, and so were able to save all the people left behind. All right?’

‘ Yes, yes ! ’

Rees Thomas then began the perilous ascent.

Feeling first with his hands for one solid step upwards, feeling round it for any moveable source of danger, feeling above it, to learn if all was clear, he at last made the step.

He paused to let David realise what he had done, and he felt the lad’s hands were at work in the way he had directed. Then repeating the process he made a second step, and David made his first.

‘ Excellently done ! ’ cried Rees Thomas.

Feeling again, he touched something which moved, fell, and then from above there was a great crash, and a scream from David ; but he did not move, further than to try to shrink into nothingness, and he called out,

‘ I am not hurt, Mr. Rees Thomas ! ’

‘ Well done, David ; that was a danger, but it has passed, is exhausted, and so the way is clearer.’

Again a step was made in safety by both,

another, and yet another, when the head of Rees Thomas was met by a decided gust of wind, assuring him he was nearing the top, and seeming to show there was plenty of room to pass over.

And so it proved. Presently both were at the top, half lying on it, while Rees Thomas unconsciously strove to penetrate the absolutely impenetrable darkness in order to see how the greater danger of the descent was to be managed.

He feared broken limbs, life-long injuries, but hardly death, if he considered only the risk of stirring unwieldy masses, and their being precipitated with them to the bottom.

But he knew not but that such a movement might displace some accidental or other support of the roof above, or whatever might be in the roof's place, and so bring down new Falls, burying them in the process.

The first thing was to know whether there was a slope, or a precipitous descent.

He sought about with his hands till he felt a roundish stone. This he set gently rolling, and he heard it knocking against one thing and

another, as it rolled down to the bottom and rested.

This was an inexpressible relief to Rees Thomas, who knew well he could not roam about where he was to find a fitting place of descent, as he had done for the ascent.

He turned now and shouted to the man left behind,

‘ Henry Best ! I am on the top and am going down. Will you come ? ’

The collier came, and guided by their directions, the sound of their voices, and at last by their hands, ascended in safety to where they were.

‘ Henry Best, stay here till we are down—first because you may endanger us who will be below you, next because you may have the benefit of our experience in going down. We may even find the descent bad for us, and yet leave it good for you.’

‘ All right,’ said Henry Best, who quite appreciated the care displayed for him, and determined not to move, or scarcely even to breathe, till he knew what he was about.

Within a few minutes all were safely landed on the ground, and had the joy of seeing in the distance the faint light of lamps promising speedy help or deliverance.

CHAPTER XII.

A BASE BANQUET.

WHERE was Israel all this time?—Rees Thomas wondered. He and the outside world must have known several hours ago of the calamity, and, it could not be doubted, must have been at work somewhere.

His knowledge of the mine, and of explosions generally, soon made him understand that a long time might have elapsed before any explorers could descend on account of the gas; and then, that they might have found it difficult to work their way to the Fall. And even after accomplishing both these things it might have been thought advisable not to spend precious time in digging through so great a ruin, but to get into the district by another route, so as to render the earliest possible succour to the imprisoned men. And this he subsequently found to be the case.

They had still some distance to go to reach the shaft, and the air was very bad, showing that the regular ventilation, if restored at all, was working as yet but imperfectly.

And as they endeavoured to make way towards that faint and apparently yet far off gleam of lamp-light, the air got worse and respiration more difficult.

They found it better nearer the ground, and so made way as well as they could on hands and knees, in the posture of so many animals, towards the light, which grew clearer, and at last enabled them to see a spectacle that for the moment silenced the party, just as they were about to raise their voices.

There were four men, each with his lighted lamp, sitting on the ground, and four black bottles standing in their midst. One of the men was already drunk, and trying to sing a stave from a popular Welsh air, a drinking song, while a second was trying to hush him, and, finding he could not, solaced himself with another drink from one of the bottles. The other two men looked as if they were not quite easy at their companions'

behaviour, or at their own share of the dishonest and base banquet.

Rees Thomas knew them all, and guessed they had been employed to search out for those of the men who might need immediate stimulants. The bottles were, or had been full of brandy, no doubt; a most precious medicine to the miner after the shock of an explosion, from burns, when one of the most trying of secondary effects is the sense of cold. A man while suffering from the intense anguish and heat of his burns in one part of his body, will be shivering miserably through all the rest of his frame.

While Rees Thomas gazed in sadness and resentment upon these men, he saw the drunken one take up one of the bottles to drink, then throw it away with violence, as in disgust to find it empty. Another bottle shared the same fate, and nearly struck David where he cowered shivering, and feeling almost sick to death.

It was the turn of the revellers now to be surprised, as they heard a hollow cry from the direction of the Fall, whence they expected no thing of life to issue.

They stared in alarm. They were ignorant and superstitious ; and, going from one extreme to the other, from utter reckless audacity in vice, to slavish fear of consequences, they were almost prepared to expect or believe anything. The drunkard's hand was on the neck of the bottle, and his hair almost stirring with awe and wild terror, as he saw the figure of a man emerge from the darkness, his head wrapped up, and looking so like a ghost, or like some new Lazarus risen from the grave, to confront them in their wickedness, that his feverish blood seemed to suddenly change, and leave nothing but ice in his veins.

Then another figure came also out of the darkness, and then a third.

The banqueters were mute, hardly able to raise a cry, each moment anticipating some dreadful issue, they knew not what.

The forms still advancing, were not recognised till they came close, and then the sight of the men's faces as they knew Rees Thomas and David Mort were before them, would have been a study for an artist.

No guilt could be greater, no shame more

damning than was now revealed in their conscious looks.

Among miners it is one of the very first of laws, as it ought to be one of the first for all men, that of incurring extreme risk, hardship, and severe and unremitting labour to succour their stricken fellows.

These men recollected all this too late, and would have gladly endured much to undo their abominable behaviour.

One of them tried to mutter out an excuse that they had found it impossible to proceed, and that they had been so cold, etc., etc., till Rees Thomas stopped him by the remark,

‘Cover your face, man ! Cover your faces, all of you, and then try to believe that neither God nor man will see you as you are !’

Disdaining to ask them a question, he examined the remaining bottles, found one full and untouched, the other partly full of brandy.

He made David drink a few drops, also the collier they had brought with them, and then himself drank, the last as usual.

While this was going on, the banqueters had

been taking hurried counsel among themselves, and had asked one of the men least compromised, who had indeed disgraced himself through his weakness in not contending against them, rather than from any desire for the debauch itself, to speak to Rees Thomas in their behalf.

He came close to the latter, very humbly, and in some confusion as to how to discharge his commission, and his task was not rendered more easy by Rees Thomas, who demanded, in a rough voice,

‘What do you want?’

‘Well, we have made a mess of it, that’s clear, and we ain’t going to deny but we’re a bit ashamed——’

‘A bit ashamed!’ interrupted Rees Thomas.

‘Well, as much as you like o’ that. Don’t stick us fast to words. But can’t we do something yet to redeem our characters? This is a bad job, and will injure us among our fellows. So if you don’t want to see us go to the devil——’

‘Go! Why aren’t you his, soul and body, already, without going? Why they’re his choicest morsels, man, those that he doesn’t need to fetch.’

‘You’re uncommon hard upon us, Rees Thomas.

We ain't like you, pious, and good, and all that sort of thing, but we are not devils neither, nor devil's meat, not yet. And I should say that you owe us something, if all you say be true on Sundays.'

'What is that?' asked Rees Thomas, with a perceptible change in his tone.

'Why, when fellows have gone wrong isn't it your place to show 'em the way back, and so help 'em to get right?'

'Come then, Jack Lloyd, I'll test you and these comrades of yours. I have come over the Fall and brought these with me. There are others still on the wrong side, some of them too ill to be moved, without friendly hands and a cordial of some kind. The way is dangerous, but we have passed uninjured. Will you risk it?'

The man held down his head, looked thoughtful and perplexed, and said, 'I'll tell them what you say,' and was going towards the others; but they had heard all, as Rees Thomas indeed had intended they should hear, and called out with hearty vigour they would go.

Foremost now was the drunkard's voice and figure. He had sobered suddenly, and was look-

ing strangely dazed and flushed, but bold and determined.

In brief but cogent words Rees Thomas gave them his experience of the passage, and indicated how they might easily hit the place where he had crossed, since they had lights, while he had none.

‘Can you trust yourselves with the brandy?’ asked Rees Thomas, glancing doubtfully at the drunkard’s haggard and disturbed face, which seemed a sort of chaos of expression.

He spoke then :

‘Give the bottles to Jack Lloyd and Osborne. They would have been right enough but for me and my chum here.’

‘Would it not be better for you to take one yourself?’ asked Rees Thomas, as he lifted the lamp that had been given to him, and looked with peculiar significance into the man’s eyes.

‘What do you mean?’ returned the man, flushing in savage defiance; then, as if doubting whether he had not mistaken what had been said, he continued—‘Did you ask that, meaning it?’

‘Yes.’

‘You mean the brandy for the folk there?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You think I might be trusted again with it?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ Then as God lives in heaven, I will die to-day before another drop shall touch my lips ; and I *will* die, or wash out this foul stain. Rees Thomas, I ask you for us all to hold your tongue about this business till you see the end. Will you?’

‘ Will I not ! Go, and God be with you. What do I say ? He is with you ! be sure of that, and intending this to be the last day of your old life, and the first of your new and better one.’

As they were going, he called back one of the men, he who had been the spokesman of the party, and whom his quick eye had detected as lacking the courage, if not the desire of the others, to do something noticeable to redeem their behaviour.

He then explained how he, David, and the other man with them, were all three much burnt and injured, and needed help, and therefore the man called he desired should stay with them.

The others agreed, and went off, and Rees Thomas followed them with his eye as long as he

could, as if to judge from their manner of the probabilities of their success.

He heard afterwards that these men saved Lusty, and brought him forth with quite a number of others, who must have perished but for the aid they so heroically rendered ; and the upshot was that the three became more talked about in the neighbourhood than Rees Thomas himself, as the burning and shining lights of humanity that had redeemed all the horrors of the mine during this day of alarm.

Fearing still worse injury from the cold that affected them all, and from the wind against the burns, Rees Thomas sent for a bundle of canvas.

Each having been rolled in an entire piece by the aid of their assistant, the late brandy drinker, they went rolling rather than walking on, like so many mummies, towards the shaft ; seeing already the faint gleams of the summer evening's light at the bottom.

Here they found Israel hard at work receiving the men, as they came or were brought to him out of the mine ; ordering those who were strong and uninjured to help others ; carefully attending also

himself to those who were helpless ; binding up wounds temporarily where possible ; where it was not, saying a word that, if it did not exactly seem one (in sound) of fraternal kindness, certainly meant well ; and all the while despatching as fast as possible, in the order of their need, the men from the bottom to the top of the shaft, having no other means than a bucket ; for one of the explosions had utterly smashed the lifting apparatus.

Rees Thomas checked David's cry towards his father which was just about to burst from his lips, and stayed him with a hand on his shoulder, while bidding him watch for a few moments his father's proceedings.

He said no more to David, but left the spectacle to do its own natural work on the boy's mind.

Israel saw nothing of them till they were so close behind him that David was able to put out his hand and touch his father's, just as it was steadying the bucket for another ascent.

He turned quickly, saw David ; turned still farther round, and saw Rees Thomas ; then, exhibiting no sign of emotion, turned again to the

bucket, and was most careful in helping one of the injured men into it. Then he spoke aloud,

‘Another can go with this man.’

‘Send David,’ said Rees Thomas.

‘No, the injured ones first,’ was Israel’s reply, looking steadily and enquiringly round upon the circle of dark, grimy, earnest faces and yearning white eyes, each longing to be first, yet unwilling to ask.

‘He is injured—is burnt,’ said Rees Thomas, ‘and needs prompt aid.’

‘Where?’ suddenly demanded the father, looking intently at his boy. ‘Not badly, David?’

‘Father; I can wait.’

Israel looked in his lad’s face with such an expression in his own as David had never before seen there.

‘You shall, my boy, if it be only that you and I may both think of it hereafter!’

‘Mr. Rees Thomas has saved my life, father, and he’s very ill.’

‘Is he?’ Again there was a piercing and most intent look, but this time into the features of the former deputy. ‘I can do him good, I think.

Rees Thomas, come ; the bucket waits. Lift him in, men. Be very careful.'

Rees Thomas was for a moment inclined to put some one else foremost, but on second thoughts submitted.

Just as the bucket was about to be swung upwards, Israel said aloud, but as if speaking only to the saviour of David's life,

' Rees Thomas, get well, if you please, as soon as possible, for I need a Deputy, and there are people here who think you are right about those morning prayers, so if only discipline be preserved, and work uninterfered with, I am content.'

Waiting no answer, he gave the signal for the ascent.

Rees Thomas closed his eyes with a feeling of being a happy man—a happy, blessed, fortunate man—in spite of the anguish of his burns, and the lassitude that every minute seemed to steal over him, and benumb his faculties.

One single ejaculation alone burst from him, and which was heard by his companion and fellow-sufferer in the bucket with surprise and awe,

' Glory to God ! It is His doing !'

CHAPTER XIII.

CASTING BREAD INTO THE WATERS.

ON reaching the top, Rees Thomas found a vast crowd of people—men, weeping women, and children—out of whom a certain number had been accepted as assistants. Every one of these was busy tending the wounded, oiling their burns, covering them with wadding, feeding them with food.

A screen of canvas had been hastily put up, with poles, and a piece thrown over as a roof, and there Rees Thomas was taken.

Two or three doctors were at work, but so coolly and deliberately, and so obviously free from the hushed excitement that affects even the medical men most used to the business when the loss of life is serious, that Rees Thomas knew without questioning the general result.

The injuries yet known were few, and as most of the people were already got out of the mine, and the remainder were apparently coming fast to the surface, Dr. Jolliffe felt himself free to comment jocundly on Israel's luck. One man only killed, a few with broken limbs, and that was all as regards the human interests at stake. Then as to the mine itself, why such a calamity, if it must happen, could not possibly have occurred at a more convenient time—when everything was going to be repaired.

To that Rees Thomas put the finishing touch by speaking of David's danger and safety.

By the time Rees Thomas was oiled and bandaged like the rest, and temporarily blinded in the process, he felt so seriously the increasing sense of physical exhaustion, that he almost forgot even to be grateful for the wonderful relief from actual pain that ensued.

Yet even then he could not but ponder over the look of concern he had seen settle on Dr. Jolliffe's face when he first took off the wrappings, and saw the nature of the injury to the right cheek.

Permanent disfigurement—ah, yes! That was what the doctor saw, he thought, and what Margaret Doubleday would see ere long.

His fortitude seemed at that moment really giving way. It was not one thing, but many things that gathered like shadows of evil and misfortune about him, each affecting him with its own peculiar and depressing influence, till the whole became overwhelming.

As he was preparing to be led home by a brother collier, news came that some friend in the village, a farmer, having heard of his accident, had brought a little chaise to carry him.

To that he was conducted by kind hands, and there found everything, even in so short a time, had been most tenderly studied for his warmth, and ease, and comfort. There were cushions to support his weak frame, wrappers for warmth, beef tea in a bottle for immediate sustenance.

His heart was touched, and his soul was full of remorse to God, for his late graceless doubts and repinings.

After secretly disburdening himself in prayer

and praise, he could not but turn full of emotion to his friend who was driving the pony with unusual carefulness, in order to keep an even pace and smooth motion.

‘Why did you take all this trouble for me?’ he asked, reproachfully.

‘Could I do less for one who has saved my life?’ was the answer, and the low peculiar tone surprised the hearer as much as the words.

‘Your life? What can you mean, Morris?’

‘Do you not know?’

‘No, indeed!’

‘Nor suspect?’

‘Indeed, and indeed, no!’

‘Well, before I knew you, I was getting into that bad way, that at last I thought there could be no extrication. I tried to read the Bible you had given me, and which I jested over when you gave it. The more I read, the darker everything seemed to grow, till I couldn’t bear to open it. One day when I was passing the pool near the limekiln, I threw it in, that I mightn’t be tempted to try any more.

‘As I watched with a sort of devilish satisfaction

the Bible sink, I found a strange jumble of things in my brain, jostling one another. I wanted to see if I should sink and be as easily done with as the book. And then I wanted to fetch the book out again. And yet how was I to manage that without coming out myself, too?—which I was clean against, if once I got in.

‘Just then, by some strange chance, as I thought it, you came by and spoke to me. I saw you had no suspicion of me, and I was glad. I don’t know what you said, and I can’t remember anything I said, but there was something in your look, your voice, and your whole manner that made me think, while my hair stood up on my head the while, that you were supernaturally sent to me, not even yourself knowing of your mission.

‘When you left me, I found a sheltered corner, and there knelt and prayed.

‘Then I leapt into the water, and tried vainly to find my Bible.

‘It had sunk into the soft muddy bottom.

‘I seemed to think it *must* be got out; that my whole future salvation depended on getting it out. Again, and again, and again I tried, till

my strength was all gone. My teeth were chattering with cold, and I stood there shivering, like a lost soul, in the bleak wind. Well, I would die or get it out, I thought once more. So after revolving the matter a bit as to the precise spot, which I might have mistaken, I ventured farther in, there found it, and brought it forth. No man could feel what I felt then, and not love the book ever after. It is *here* now, Rees Thomas, near my heart.'

Then controlling his voice, and speaking more calmly, he added, after a pause,

'So you won't wonder any more, I hope, if I try, so far as my little means go, to show you what I think and feel.'

Rees Thomas had no time to reply, much as he desired, for they were now but a few yards from the door of his house.

He wondered, perhaps felt hurt, that he had seen nothing of Margaret among all the other tearful and anxious women at the pit's mouth.

Mrs. Mort he had seen there, conspicuous in the crowd, wringing her hands like a wild creature, and crying out,

‘Where is he? My boy David! Why do they not bring him up?’

He would gladly have spoken to her, but could not conveniently, and so his eyes had passed away in their search for Margaret.

Not finding her he had hoped that she and her mother had happily remained ignorant of all.

He wished, therefore, now to be the first to tell her.

With the aid of Morris—the kind farmer—he walked to the little gate, and through the little bit of front garden, still hearing for a moment or two no sound.

Then he heard the door open hurriedly, and stretching out his hand as if he were indeed a blind man, called out:

‘Margaret!’

‘Rees Thomas! Hurt! Oh, mother, mother! Come! Come! Quick!’

‘Thou hast but to thank God with me, Margaret, for His mercies and for His chastisement. Be not afraid. All will be well!’

So saying, he shook his friend by the hand, said a few words, and hurriedly wished him good-bye.

Then he felt for Margaret's hand, and guided by this—all trembling as he felt it was—passed over the threshold, and shut the door after him, which was not again to be opened for him to go forth to work for many a day.

CHAPTER XIV.

NEW HOPES AND FEARS.

EVER thoughtful of others, and feeling a special interest in and love for the boy, Rees Thomas's last words to the farmer had been to ask him to go back again to the mine, and do for David and his mother what he had done for him.

Morris found the boy just out of the doctor's hands; who pooh-poohed the idea of anything serious, said he would be all right again in a few days, and tried to make David laugh by saying to him he had been only winning his spurs after the old knightly idea, a little modernised in the mode of appliance.

David grew cheerful and animated on the way home. He highly appreciated the conveyance, and the cushions that protected his weary frame and his burned shoulder, and he luxuriated

in the sense of the great relief from pain he enjoyed.

But these things, after all, did not make up the whole or even the most essential part of David's change of feeling. Something much more sweet was acting on his wounded spirit as a precious balm. He had not, after all, been such a coward.

Or, if he had, people didn't know it, and they did know what he had said to his father.

Already he had heard his father's men talking of it, and looking at him, while he was waiting for the doctor to dress his wound; and he had not quite known whether he ought to be ashamed or proud—ashamed they should think so much better of him than, on the whole, he deserved—proud that they were not mistaken, at all events, in the matter they talked of.

What a story he had to tell his mother on the way home! Othello's to Desdemona was nothing to it. Nor was the lady's receptive belief in all the dangers and wonders told to her, to be compared, for a moment, with Mrs. Mort's acceptance of David's narrative. And as Rees Thomas

played in it so significant a part, the listener who drove them was scarcely less interested. And he thought how he would like to tell Rees Thomas on his bed of sickness some of these things if he could only recollect the words.

Some days have passed, and have brought a change over David. He is nearly well in body; but, as he improves in that respect, he suffers proportionally in mind. Each day, each night, each meal, reminds him how soon the work in the mine must begin again. And ever the thought of it grows more and more one of utter disgust.

He fights against this insidious enemy bravely. He believes what his mother says, that it is disuse has brought back the old horror of the mine, and that use will drive it away. He owns that his father may be right in saying he will benefit through his whole life afterwards by the knowledge and practical familiarity and general discipline that will grow out of such squalid and humiliating labour. In fact, he objects to nothing but her conclusion,—

‘My dear boy, you must go back to the mine.’

He says nothing even to that, remembering how often and with what passionate antagonism he had responded to such sayings ; but not the less does he feel he would give all he has in the world—and as that is not very much, why, then, a good deal of all he ever hopes to obtain—to be allowed to go to some other occupation. He does not care what, if only his father would consent, and find one for him. There is hardly any trade, employment, or form of industry that does not grow positively winning in its attractiveness when looked at beside the mine, with its foulness and ever-attendant dangers, its grave-like depths, and ghostly suggestiveness.

He knows all the same he must do it. And the knowledge gives new intensity and strength to his hatred of the work. His mind is growing, its powers enlarging ; he begins partly to perceive and understand this, but also feels increasing bitterness with his fate, becomes more inclined to be rebellious, if only he knew how to resist, and what else to do.

Dimly, vaguely, the thought steals in upon him now and then, Can he not run away, and

earn his livelihood in his own manner, how and where he pleases? Why not? Other boys have done this and succeeded, and have become great men. Why not he?’

But when he begins in thought to realise the idea, to trace his course among strangers, to whom he could be no other than poor boys were about his own neighbourhood to the people who lived there, some of whom he had seen in rags, and picking out of dust heaps by the street side morsels of carrot, lumps of stale bread, parings of apples and potatoes—when in his ignorance of the world at large he tried to understand it, and was driven for means of comparison to his own limited experience, he shrank back in affright, and found even the mine a shelter, and his father a friend.

The last day of his convalescent leisure has arrived. Once more he is combating with his difficulties, and finds one peculiar mode of help without being willing to acknowledge it. Being as he is, ever in fear of seeing the word coward flaming before him and before the eyes of the world, he is in constant alarm that some moment of trial, of call, will come to him, and he will fail to answer it.

This ever-present fear often drives him consciously to subject himself to manly and robust influences, that otherwise his temperament would instinctively have shrunk from. It influences him now to come at last to the conclusion to say to his father he is ready, without waiting for the latter to summon him.

Thinking that well over, it pleased him, and in pleasing it strengthened him. And so his cheerfulness began to return.

In the evening when Israel came home (the accident already sufficiently cared for, and forgotten), his hands and pockets full of papers—plans, accounts, estimates, etc.—David was able not only to say the thing he had resolved on, but so to say it that Israel was even more impressed with the manner than with the matter—a most uncommon result.

He looked at the lad's pale but still bright face steadily. The blue frank eyes looked back with no sign of shrinking or furtiveness, and then Israel held out his hand, grasped David's little one warmly, and said,

‘I shall be proud of thee yet, lad!’ and went

away without another word, as if the matter were done with for some years to come.

A recollection of something brought him back.

‘What’s that the doctor says about the burns being where some injury had happened before? He looked at me, as if he thought I had given you some cruel flogging. Did I?’

‘No, father!’ responded David, passing his hand over his face, to conceal how it had suddenly flushed to the hue of scarlet.

‘Well?’ said Israel impatiently, after a pause, and wondering what the boy’s change of colour and his behaviour might mean.

David in those few moments was in an agony of doubt and irresolution. Should he lie? And then what lie would do to satisfy a man like his father? Coward! That word again confronted him. The truth should out. The affair was so long ago that no harm could happen if he did tell.

Such were the thoughts that swept in rapid sequence through David’s brain in those few seconds of time that passed while Israel waited for his answer. And then in broken, almost

incoherent language, he told the story of the horsewhipping.

Then for the first time in his life did David see how his father could be moved.

The stony insensibility of his features changed into a fixed expression that was fearful. His lips visibly whitened with rage.

He walked slowly away in dead silence, and stood by the window looking out.

Then, as if that did not suit him, he turned, and his face being away from David, looked down on the ground, as if there only, in the wit and sagacity of mother Earth, was to be found the counsel he sought.

He came back, and made David tell the story a second time, which he did much more intelligibly; as Israel had got enough out of the first narrative to guide him in the method.

Then he called in his wife; who, busy in the kitchen preparing some little delicacy for David which Israel was not to know of, remained ignorant of the discovery.

Seeing the look on his face, she dropped in her fright the floury knife she had held in her hand,

and stood as one appalled, conscious of a coming and fearful revelation, yet unable even to guess at its nature.

‘ Did you know of this— ? ’—he paused as if unwilling to use the right word, yet too proud to disguise the matter of it by weaker ones, ‘ this—horsewhipping—of David ? ’

Whether David feared his mother’s weakness, the usual vice by which the victim tries to evade the harshness of the oppressor, and saw it could only make matters worse, as discovery was certain ; or whether it was simply the desire to speak for her, as she seemed unable to speak for herself, he at all events called out hurriedly,

‘ Father, I didn’t intend to tell anybody, because ’—he paused a little as if confused ; ‘ because I was so ashamed, and because,’—there he paused again.

‘ Because ? ’ repeated Israel, in his most dangerous tone and mood,—

‘ Because I thought it better to bear it in silence, than make mischief ; but I wasn’t man enough to keep it from mother, and—and I was obliged to have something done to—’

‘Take off his bandages!’ cried Israel harshly, interrupting the boy.

They were taken off, and Israel was able to see the marks still remaining of the severe cuts received from Mr. Griffith Williams’s whip.

‘Ah, that will do! Wrap him up again. I was afraid there might be no sufficient signs left. How long is it since?’

David told him, and Israel reckoned up the days, and looked almost vindictively at his wife, that she should, by keeping him in ignorance, have left it almost a matter of doubt whether he could obtain what he intended if possible to exact—aye, even if necessary at the price of all he owned in the world—redress.

But the thought of the greater criminal, and of all that might be necessary to bring him to justice, weakened the temptation to trouble about the lesser one, so for a wonder she escaped; but in doing so was conscious she would have to be on her best behaviour, and not dare to intervene in any way, by word or act, between him and Griffith Williams’s punishment.

He went upstairs to the bed room, and they

could hear his footsteps going towards a closet, where he kept many private things he valued.

David and his mother looked at one another with increasing alarm, but said nothing, and listened intently.

Not a sound could they hear, and that fact struck them as unusual, portentous, as if Israel were meditating something so serious, that even he went out of his way to study how best to keep his movements and gestures unknown to those below.

Nothing more alarming than that fact, if it were true, could well happen to the two listeners.

At last they heard him moving again freely as before, and then he came down, and went out and left them.

Sad and full of misgivings were the hearts of those who remained, knowing nothing of his intentions—whether he would retaliate in kind, or publicly expose the offender, or go to law, as before, and get heavy damages, or resort to even worse measures.

‘Oh mother, mother!’ cried David, after an ineffectual attempt to restrain his tongue. ‘If he

has been to fetch his revolver, the one Mr. Jehoshaphat gave him when he used to go to the Bank ! Do go up and see !’

Mrs. Mort went, found the cupboard locked, but remembered it had been only accidentally left open. No conclusion either way, therefore, could be drawn. And this satisfied Mrs. Mort for the time. But not so David, who again cried out,

‘ Oh mother, he is going to the Farm ; he will kill her father ! ’

CHAPTER XV.

ISRAEL'S EVENING RIDE.

ABOUT this time Israel did a thing that excited no little comment among his neighbours, and afforded them no little amusement. He appeared one day on the road from Leath, after the annual cattle-market, mounted on a powerful and reasonably good-looking brown mare.

When any acquaintance met or passed him, and smiled, nodded, or made some remark about his new purchase, he answered the nod, smile, or remark with imperturbable good humour; and went his way, aware that everyone stopped and looked after him, to study such an unwonted spectacle. But he did not get nervous therefore, or appear restlessly shifting his seat, or stiffening himself to sit more upright, or seeming to be so much at ease that he could afford to busy him-

self in the study of the landscape, like other equestrian novices on their first essay, when exposed to criticism.

Whether he had taken lessons on some of his necessarily frequent visits of business to Leath, no one knew; but after the first general laugh at the oddity of his appearance, it was decided by common consent he would ride well enough in time, because he was so lithe, and so fearless.

And then too it began to be discovered, with that wisdom after the event that so happily characterises the world of gossipers, that a horse must be very useful to Israel in his new position, and they only wondered he hadn't thought of so sensible a thing before.

Had they known why Israel chose that precise period of time to begin to ride, their interest in his movements would have been marvellously quickened just when they began to slacken in their observation. An incident revealed the truth about the horsemanship to at least one person, Mr. Griffith Williams.

Just a week had elapsed from the time of Israel's discovery of how his boy had been treated

by the Squire, and it was beginning to be supposed at home that he had forgiven, or forgotten the offence in his many absorbing occupations.

It was market-day at Leath, and drawing towards evening—a cool, delicious summer's evening—just such a one as might be supposed to tune men's hearts to peace and accord, and leave it impossible for feuds or strifes of any kind to exist for the time being. At this hour, when earth and sky seemed to vie with each other in serene tender beauty, when the sun had just gone down, but left much of his splendour behind him, and the moon was just rising faint, but inexpressibly sweet, and seeming to call forth one by one the lovely and interminable procession of stars around her, it was then that Israel appeared just under the shadow of some lofty trees, sitting his brown mare like a statue, with uplifted hand holding his heavy riding whip at the lash end, the handle resting on his knee.

Strange to say, he had not, like most other horsemen on the road, come from market, on his way home. He had come from his home to this spot, there taken his stand, and waited.

To those who came from Leath, he was entirely hidden till they turned the corner, and then they met him face to face. Anyone else, knowing his own purposes, would have found it difficult to meet so many eyes questioning him, and have moved about from time to time, to conceal the fact he wanted to be stationary. But Israel apparently was content to know that if he attained his object, these people's thoughts wouldn't trouble him, and that he was most likely to attain his object by staying where he was.

But he started into sudden activity when a horseman approached, going towards Leath. He advanced to meet him, shook hands, became curious, for a wonder, as to where his acquaintance was going, but relapsed into his own thoughts, and went back to his place of shelter, the moment he found the horseman was not going more than a few yards before he would turn off towards his own farm.

‘He knows us both, and would be sure, if they had met, to say he had seen me, and here,’ Israel commented to himself as he again glanced

through the tall brushwood against which he stood, and looked along the road.

He had thus waited, perhaps nearly three quarters of an hour, when he heard a loud cheery voice calling out, and others farther off answering it.

‘Ah! All right!’ he thought, as he felt and shook the reins, took his whip by the handle, and, leaning just a little forward, listened intently, and once more motionless.

He could hear by the things they said, by their jovial laughs that any trifle sufficed to call forth, and by the tone of their voices, they were all somewhat elated by liquor, and coming along in a very irregular fashion—cantering, trotting, walking, all within a very short distance.

‘They must stop, anyhow, to pass round the corner,’ Israel said to himself, as he gently moved his horse a pace or two forwards—in fact as far as he could go without being seen.

‘Well, good night, gentlemen!’ called out a voice exceedingly near—and that the voice of Mr. Griffith Williams. ‘I shall leave you and gallop off home!’

‘Good night!’—‘Good night!’ replied some half-dozen voices in chorus, and Griffith put spurs to his horse, and dashed into the partial shade made by the angle of the road and the over-arching trees.

But almost as suddenly as he started did he stop, throwing his horse on to his haunches by the violence he used, for he saw a horseman advance from the brushwood on the right, almost as if he leaped into the road, turn, and face him—so exactly in the line of his own movement as to show he meant mischief.

A second glance showed who the horseman was, and then Griffith understood what was the true meaning of Israel’s new accomplishment—it was simply to facilitate getting at him, who was almost always on horseback, riding about the country for sport or exercise, or for the agreeable duties of his farm.

The laugh that was his first impulse died out when he saw the look and attitude of Israel, and he remembered, almost like a thing that had happened long ago, how he had treated David.

He had no fear of Israel—except as regards

the thoughts of the public, should any fresh scandal arise from this evidently intended meeting.

He glanced back, before either had spoken, and saw his companions just at his heels, and thought it would certainly be well, if possible, to avoid the disgrace of a vulgar personal contest. He remembered too his own later thoughts about the propriety of his dealing with David, and so felt altogether a real and earnest desire to let no more evil happen at present—and on that lovely night—and while he was yet in all the jovial good fellowship of spirit excited by wine and the society of his companions.

Thus he was for the moment silent and still, though his mettlesome steed struck the ground repeatedly, as if to ask If his master wanted to gallop, why didn't he?

Israel's steed, on the contrary, was like its master—silent, motionless, grim.

The other gentlemen, mostly persons of Griffith's own rank, or large tenant-farmers, now noticed the two men thus facing each other in so still and remarkable a manner, and instantly the

cry went round—‘Israel Mort!’ ‘What does the fellow want?’ ‘Let’s ride him down!’

Griffith’s upraised arm stopped the execution of this feat—if indeed it were anything more than a bubble of reckless friendship just blown out of the fumes of the wine they had been drinking, and which would have at once evaporated in attempting to be practical.

‘Two words to that, before you try,’ said the hard voice of Israel. ‘I have no quarrel with you, nor you with me. Go your way. This gentleman and I have a little private business to do together, which I think he would prefer being done in private.’

Seeing, however, their only reply was a general laugh, and then a hurried discussion among themselves, he addressed himself to Griffith.

‘It was not a very manly thing, Mr. Griffith Williams, to horsewhip my boy—to lash him so that even yet the marks are to be seen; but I do you the credit to believe you are, in spite of that ugly fact, not quite so mean or cowardly as to shelter yourself behind all these respectable gentlemen, to whom I say once more—Pass

on, and leave us alone to the settlement of our account.'

Then in a louder, sterner, and almost excited tone, he said—'You see, do you not? I don't attack him as he attacked my boy, by surprise. I leave that to squires and gentlemen. No, I come here armed with my wrong, and this riding whip. He has the same kind of weapon, and I here offer to exchange with him if he thinks I have played any foul tricks with mine. But go from here he does not, nor do I, till I have larned him something or he has larned it to me!'

'And suppose,' said Griffith, whose choler was fast rising, 'I don't choose to degrade myself in such a fashion?'

'Then I choose to do the job for you.'

'On, gentlemen! Out of the way, rascal!' shouted Griffith, spurring his horse, intending by the sudden onset to overthrow Israel, if the latter did not move; but he, also spurring his mare, a more powerful animal than the blood chestnut ridden by his antagonist, drove sideways against the other—and shook the animal and its rider so violently, that for the moment it was all Griffith could

do to retain his seat; and that moment Israel used to strike him—so fiercely, that he felt his face and brow were cut; the blood gushed forth, blinded him, and before he knew well what he was doing or should do, he had fallen heavily to the ground, and was rolling in the dust of the summer road, while his horse madly galloped away, and was lost even to the sight of the gentlemen who witnessed the scene.

Before they had time to decide what they had best do, Israel had slid from his mare, and at the very moment that Griffith, stupefied, had risen a little on to his hands and knees, Israel was over him, and lashing him with the strength of an arm that made every blow a severe injury, an intolerable torture.

He had struck thus perhaps half-a-dozen times when he found himself surrounded by the other gentlemen, and his motions impeded, while one hand even clasped his wrist.

He became at once collected, calm, and said almost with a smile,

‘Don’t be alarmed, gentlemen, enough’s as good as a feast. I have done. I ask you all to report

the facts as they happened, just as they happened!'

He looked at every one of the scowling, angry faces, which showed the owners would like to horsewhip him in return, or arrest him as a malefactor; but as he passed through them, recommending them to see to their friend, they did nothing, and he went to his brown mare, got up, and rode off, never once looking behind.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUMMONS *v.* SUMMONS.

WHAT would any man of moderately good sense and average power of judgment have done, in Griffith Williams's position, supposing such qualities and position to be at all compatible? Surely, he would have eaten his leek, or as Lusty phrased it, when expressing his opinions about the matter, have grinned and bore, knowing that he had given the provocation, and that the more the affair was talked of, the worse it must be for him.

Of course, therefore, that was just what Mr. Williams did not do. By the side of this outrage upon him, his own on David seemed to become too trivial to engage the attention of sensible men. His friends were to a man ready to testify that he had done nothing at the meeting to justify Israel's

ferocious attack. He was a magistrate, and felt convinced that his brother magistrates would resent such an atrocity done on a member of their order. Finally he had no longer the restraint that fear of publicity had before given. Everybody knew of the circumstance; the local papers were full of it, and when in sheer disgust of reading even friendly notices in them, he turned to his London daily, the very first thing that attracted his eye was a paragraph headed, A MAGISTRATE HORSEWHIPPED.

Before he went home that night he had obtained, not what he wanted, a warrant for the arrest of Israel Mort, but a summons for the next meeting of the Petty Sessions.

This was executed immediately, the man employed forcing his way into Israel's bed chamber to serve the summons, and serving it upon him in bed.

The alarm and distress of Mrs. Mort and David may be easily imagined, as they, both trembling, and fancying that perhaps some great crime had been committed to obtain their late prosperity, followed the man up the stairs, David in his night

shirt, having been waked by the clamour of the man outside wanting to see Mr. Mort particularly.

Israel sat up, took the document in one hand, and a candle in the other, and read it through, then said to the man,

‘Very well. You’ll have one to serve for me in the morning. Good night.’ He then adjusted his night-cap, turned, and addressed himself again to sleep.

His wife and son, having followed the stranger downstairs, and fastened the door after him, sat down, and gazed blankly on each other’s faces.

‘It’s all coming out now, mother!’ said David, in a tone of the deepest, most passionate despair. ‘I thought it would! Father’s going to get a summons against Mr. Williams for beating me! I shall have to be in court—and—and—Nest will hate me all her life if her father gets punished and disgraced, and all through me. And if she doesn’t, it’ll be all the same. She’ll never be able to speak to me! And she’ll get older, and feel she’s rich, and beautiful, and that I was but a

collier's boy, and that her father had whipped me like one of his dogs—and—but mother, I won't go! No, that I will not!

‘Won't go where, David?’

‘Not to the court, to speak against Mr. Griffith. I couldn't. No—not if father were to use me worse than Mr. Griffith, or to bribe me by saying I should go no more down into the mine.’

‘Hush, David—hush! Or the father will hear.’

She drew him nearer to her, made him nestle in her loving bosom, and there they sat, and talked over plans that had been for some time seething in the brain of David, and which now for the first time he found his unhappy mother willing to listen to.

And in talking, in low, earnest, pathetic tones, they forgot how time was passing; and when at last David lay down in his little cot, and his mother kissed him, he had to ask her to draw down the blind, for already it was daybreak.

Israel, on his part, was also wakeful. Not disturbed in the least by the summons, or by the new contest he must engage in, of summons

against summons, counter-charge against charge ; no, he with clear eye saw that the issue could be of no serious moment to him, even if he got the worst, and dismissed it, characteristically, till the morrow, when there would be something to do.

No, he was not thinking of Mr. Griffith Williams, and the summons against him to be taken out, or of the crowded court that would soon have to be faced, or even of what his wife and son might be now thinking or suffering through the summons.

And yet he was thinking at last of David, as David had so long hopelessly yearned for him to think. He was conning over a number of little incidents of the boy's behaviour in the mine, and of some rather striking words dropped almost accidentally by Rees Thomas about the lad's bright future ; and he was seriously weighing the question how much longer it might be necessary, for the sake of the discipline and practical knowledge involved, that David should work in the pit.

He could not, or would not decide that question now, but he thought the boy deserved some

encouragement, and he would see if it could be given without upsetting him.

It so happened, however, that he said nothing till the morning when they had all to go to Leath, for the hearing of the case.

They breakfasted very early ; and Israel, remembering what he had resolved to do, his thoughts naturally busied themselves more than ordinarily on the subject of David. Thus he came to take more notice than was usual with him, and so became aware, as he supposed, how deeply both wife and son were affected by the business of the day.

Not choosing to consult with them on such a subject, or indeed to speak of the affair at all—looking upon David's part in it as such a mere matter of course that it was not even worth while questioning him about it in advance—he still, with a feeling unusual with him, set himself to ease the hearts of both, if he could, on much more important matters.

‘ Wife,’ said he, ‘ you will be glad to hear that David gets on so fairly that there'll be no need for him to stay long down below.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mrs. Mort, with an air that was more like that of pained surprise, than of the sudden burst of joyful gratitude Israel expected. And then her eye seemed wistfully to seek David’s, who determinedly looked down.

‘Indeed!’ said he, sternly repeating her word. ‘Doesn’t that suit thee—or David?’

‘Oh yes, indeed!’

‘Then don’t interrupt. You break the chain of my thought, and it takes time and patience to get it straight again. Where was I? Aye, David, thou shall see, in a few months most likely, what it is I have been working for. I shall send thee to a college I know of, where thou will get an education fit for a prince; and larn all the sciences that bear upon mining business; and then, after a spell of that, you shall go under a good man I know, who has the management of a whole lot of mines, so that you can get among ’em every sort of experience; and then thou shall come back and be my agent a year or two, and then come out at last as a whole company, in thy single self, for Israel Mort and Co. will be just us two. What does thou say to that, David—and thou too, wife?’

Both were much moved, and deeply grateful, and so far Israel's experiment had been a successful one. But if he had been more accustomed to read the faces of those about him, and who should have been dear to him—nay, who were dear to him in a sort of fashion—he would have seen something in the manner of both, heard something in the tones of both, of warning, and of the necessity that he should at once probe the matter to the bottom.

But he was too much engrossed by his worldly cares to see more than they desired he should see, and perfectly content that they accepted his scheme as one of no ordinary value.

It had been arranged that they were to be ready at eight o'clock, dressed in their best clothes ; when Israel would send a light cart, and careful driver, to take both to the court-house at Leath.

But David, as the time came for his father to go forth, could not help, it seemed, in the gratitude of his heart, coming close to Israel's chair, and taking his hand, and kissing it ; and dropping on his knees on a little stool that stood there ; and at last clasping his father round the waist, and

bursting out into a passion of tears, and sobs, and broken speech.

All Israel could get out of the boy's words was David's sorrow for so misunderstanding him, and giving him so much trouble; and his yearning desire to be forgiven and to be thought as well of as possible in the future.

And then, just as David's gratitude became almost oppressive, Mrs. Mort must join in, and Israel had to pass his arm round her, and quiet her excitement, inexplicable as it seemed to him. But he was in the mood either to feel he could respond to the affection exhibited, or seem to do so, very happily.

Shall we attempt to look into the innermost recesses of Israel's heart as he saw himself once more master of the hearts of those two persons? Shall we ask whether he consciously played the hypocrite, a character certainly not natural to him, while seeming to recur to old days when the affections did occupy some part—however small—of his moral framework, and when he had not yet put on, with almost ostentatious cynicism, the air of a man who acknowledges no brotherhood

with his kind? Shall we ask such questions? Let us first be sure we can to a certainty justly answer them. Good and evil are so inextricably mingled in human motive that often when even character itself seems to tell us trumpet-tongued by its actions, what must have been the impelling power to this good or to that evil, we have often but to live on a few years more to find we were utterly mistaken and unjust.

For the present, then, at least, let us suspend judgment, and be content to wait and watch.

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE BENCH.

THE court-house was crowded. There was a full bench of magistrates, and every spare seat on the bench was occupied by noblemen and gentlemen resident in the neighbourhood; who had heard of this, the latest incident of the war between Israel Mort and his former employer; and wanted to see the leaders of the fray, and watch the fortunes of the legal fight.

Mr. Griffith Williams had engaged counsel, but Israel absolutely forbid his lawyers to copy his example. He would conduct his own case, and all he asked was, they should instruct and guide him as to forms.

Some minor cases had to be gone through first, and then there was full opportunity for the spectators to study the aspect, persons, and behaviour of each of the now renowned combatants.

Griffith was on the bench, a part of his face and brow and one eye covered with black silk, to conceal the wound and its dressings. Israel was in the body of the court where the lawyers sat.

The first thing that startled the ears of the auditory was Israel's harsh demand, the moment the case was called on, that Mr. Griffith Williams should do what he—Israel—was obliged to do, occupy a place in the body of the court.

‘It seems to me, Sir,’ he said, ‘that as a magistrate among magistrates, Mr. Griffith Williams cannot possibly be also a defendant, standing before the court for judgment in a case where he is charged with wanton cruelty to a boy of tender years.’

There was some murmuring and putting of heads together on the bench at this appeal, and Mr. Griffith Williams rose, and in a gentlemanly way that could not altogether conceal that he trembled with excitement or repressed passion at Israel's audacity, offered at once to resign his privilege, and descend to the place suggested.

Here the chairman interposed, and said in bland

accents, after a shrewd glance round, that told him there was no vacant seat—

‘It is no question of privilege, Mr. Mort, but of convenience. You see how crowded the court is. You are quite welcome to find a place here too, if you can.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Israel, ‘that is sufficient. Personally I don’t care a straw about the matter.’ And so saying, he showed by his quiescent attitude, he did not intend to try his chances for a place on the bench.

The summons first issued was first about to be inquired into, when Israel again raised his voice, and remembering the hint given by his lawyers, who were shocked by the ‘Sir,’ he said—

‘Your worship will, I am sure, permit me to say that the two assaults charged are in effect one affair; and therefore, to get at the bottom of it, it is necessary you should first hear my charge against Mr. Williams, as that alone can explain his having the opportunity to bring a charge against me.’

Then fancying from their behaviour and what few words he could catch, that they were about to

ignore his demand, he said in a loud voice, that rang through the court :—

‘He horsewhipped my boy, and I horsewhipped him ; therefore you’ll be putting the cart before the horse if you begin with his charge, and not with mine !’

Again Mr. Williams, as if determined to support with dignity an undignified position, interposed ; and added his wish that Mr. Mort’s charge should be first gone into, and for doing which his lawyer whispered he might lose the cause.

‘Where is the boy ?’ asked the chairman, thus putting a question to Israel that Israel had put to himself many times during the last few minutes, and with increasing anger every time.

‘I am expecting him, every minute,’ replied Israel. ‘I fear some accident has happened to the vehicle.’

There was at this period some little confusion and noise at one of the smaller doorways leading into and out of the court, which at first was supposed to be merely the effect of the pressure ; but it soon appeared that a man, with his hat elevated to keep it out of harm’s way, was struggling to pass

through the dense mass of the people, and reach the place where Israel was.

At last he managed to catch Israel's eye, and was at once recognised as the driver who had been sent to fetch Mrs. Mort and David.

With some effort, aided by the officers of the court, Israel got to him; and heard with blank astonishment that the driver found no one in the house, and that after waiting some minutes he judged they must have gone by some other conveyance.

‘Were you after your time?’ demanded Israel harshly.

‘No, rather before it,’ replied the man, ‘as the neighbours will tell you.’

‘The neighbours, had they seen them go? Did you ask?’

‘Yes, but no one had seen them.’

Israel knew at once his cause was lost. He was before hostile judges. His wife and son were alike absent, and were the only parties who could have proved the character and amount of the original injury.

Suddenly he remembered the doctor ; and called out in a loud voice,

“ Is Dr. Jolliffe here ? ” There was no response. Israel’s case was hopeless.

Still he hesitated not a moment to demand a postponement of the inquiry, and was very curtly interrupted by Mr. Griffith Williams’s counsel, who treated the demand as absurd, and appealed to the Court to proceed with their charge—the only real one, no doubt, though Mr. Mort had tried to hoodwink them, while getting up some trivial or imaginary case.

The chairman decided promptly to go on, and leave it to Israel to proceed at some future day if he pleased with his own complaint as an independent case.

The counsel called witness after witness who had been present at the encounter on the previous evening, and their evidence was clear against Israel that he had been lying in wait, that he had compelled Mr. Griffith Williams, in self-defence, to the only hostile act committed by the latter—the spurring his horse with the intention of forcing his way past, and that he had then been struck most

savagely, knocked off his horse, and again lashed severely before they could get to him, and interpose.

Israel looked at each witness in succession, as if he had the power of searching their very hearts, but declined to cross-examine, or ask any questions.

The evidence against him being ended, he was asked what he had to say.

‘Nothing,’ he replied, ‘but this: I have told you before, and I tell you again, he treated my boy most cruelly—and this I could have proved if you had thought proper to wait!’ Then as if for a moment stung into entire abandonment of all that ordinarily strong self-control that he was master of, he dashed his heavy fist down upon the table before him, and his voice rang clear and loud through the court, as he exclaimed, ‘And I will prove it yet—but not before you, unjust judges that you are! *There* is the true criminal, sitting among you—one of yourselves—and I was a fool to come here, and expect to be righted. End the farce if you please, and let me go!’

This was not a very prudent speech to make, and it naturally made every magistrate on the

bench, biassed perhaps before, decidedly hostile now ; and inclined to punish him severely, that is to say, with imprisonment for a longer or shorter period.

But there was something in the man's earnest conviction and indomitable fearlessness, that suggested there might be truth in his allegation about the boy ; and that if so, it behoved the Court to be careful how it gave way to the influence of his insolent and disrespectful speech and behaviour.

So after taking him to task for this, and darkly hinting at what they might have done, the chairman said that on the whole they were inclined to suppose, from various circumstances that had not come formally before them, that Israel had laboured under the impression of his boy having received some severe injury from the prosecutor, and therefore they should simply inflict a fine upon him of twenty pounds, and the costs.

Israel drew out a well-filled purse, paid the clerk his demand, and deigning not another word or look to any one, hurried away as fast as he could, the spectators making a lane for him, and

gazing in his face with real interest, while one man ventured to say to him as he passed—

‘ Well done, master, thou’st hit ’em hard ! ’

‘ Ha, Lewis, is that thee ! ’ In another minute he was gone, and Mr. Griffith Williams was shaking hands with his brother magistrates, and being now condoled with on his wound, and now congratulated on his verdict, according to the mood and disposition of the speaker.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY THE SEA MARGE.

By the time Israel Mort had got into the cool air of the street, (which was so refreshing, that almost unconsciously he took off his hat, and stood bareheaded in the soft rain that was falling,) he had forgotten the irritations of his contest and failure with Mr. Griffith Williams—the disappointment of seeing the sweet morsel of revenge or justice snatched from his lips—the loss to his pocket through the fine and the heavy costs—for he already feared some other and greater calamity awaited him.

Prompt as usual in decision, when he had had the opportunity of slowly thinking the matter out beforehand, he, after a brief pause before the court-house, put on his hat ; and went not the way he had intended, into the lower part of the town

to make inquiries, but straight back to his inn, there to saddle his horse, the ostler being busy, and ride off homewards as fast as his mare could carry him.

He reviewed on the way his late talk with David and his wife, and seemed to feel a certain satisfaction in it, for it showed him there was nothing to be feared in that direction.

Practically he felt sure it was either some monstrous act of stupidity on the part of his wife, or else—Well, he could get no further. The whole business was as inexplicable as it had been injurious.

Could any friend who was driving the same way have called at his house before the man he sent, and persuaded them to go with him, and had the vehicle come to grief in some cross country road that might have been taken to shorten the distance?

Such were the thoughts, fears, and hopes of Israel Mort, who was quite forced out of his usual self by this annoying circumstance, and seemed no longer the same man.

At every solitary house he passed he made

inquiries, but always with the same negative result, and it was not till he was near home that he could get the least information.

As he passed the little post office, around which was congregated some half a score of gossips, chattering loudly, he noticed there was a sudden hush, and that all eyes were turned upon him.

For a moment he fancied they knew something, and that it was too serious for any one to volunteer to speak, till he remembered where and on what business he had been, and that they knew he must have just come from the court; and he was inclined to curse his own increasing stupidity and perturbation of mind, which disinclined him to speak to them.

However he stopped, and said carelessly, ‘Has any one seen my wife and son lately?’

There was no answer for a moment, and the people addressed looked one at another, as if each suggested somebody else should reply.

‘Are you all deaf?’ asked Israel, this time with his old harshness of tone. ‘Martin, is that you?’

‘Aye, aye, it’s me, sure enough!’

‘Is there anything the matter, that they are stricken dumb?’

‘Well, we hope not, we hope not. But it seems Bill Barclay met Mrs. Mort and David going towards the sea, at Start Point, about seven o’clock in the morning, and being at work on a bit of allotment land, he naterally expected to see them come back; for, as he says, he knows no other way, except by going a many miles round; but, however that may be, they didn’t come back right up to his dinner time. And since then one on us here has just returned from your house, which was locked up, and empty.’

‘And is it possible you are all fools enough to think there is anything strange in my wife and son taking a stroll for an hour or two along the sea shore! Start Point, you say?’

‘Yes, Master Israel.’

Israel galloped off, never troubling himself about what all those people could have replied, that it was strange, and very strange, his wife and son should take to roaming about the sea shore when they all knew Israel had appointed that very time for them to meet him at Leath court-house.

But he did not forget that appointment as he galloped along, or fail to realise all it suggested. But he stayed his thoughts with the strong hand ; refused to think or speculate, but grimly waited to see what it was he was hurrying to meet.

Leaving him for a brief space, let the reader go back for a few hours and accompany David and his mother on that prolonged visit to Start Point, which so disturbed the kindly spirit of Bill Barclay, while raising potatoes in his allotment ground.

It is one of the brightest, most golden mornings of the late summer ; a mist has just passed away, and left behind a delicious sparkle in the grass, a crystal clearness in the air.

A ship is seen in the offing, with sail after sail expanding to the crisp but pleasant breeze.

Presently a boat quits the ship for the shore with a couple of men in her, and there waits for a poor weeping woman, whose looks do not belie her case, for she is just parting with her all, her boy, her only remaining child, who does his best to comfort her, and to make her sure he will come back a strong, rich man.

‘ And then—oh, mother ! who knows?—perhaps I may marry Nest ! ’

The captain is his friend, and will tell her all about him. She will hear of him soon sitting on some high office stool, laughing or crying over her letters, and learning how to begin the life that is to end in his becoming a rich merchant.

Again they embrace, and one of the sailors draws him away and into the boat, while the other, with oars in hand, prepares to start.

He is in, the boat is off, the deed is done that can no longer be undone, but must now be taken with all its consequences.

They wave handkerchiefs to each other incessantly till the ship is reached. The poor mother strains her eyes as if she would read in his face if his purpose falters at the last moment ; but, no—he is too far off for her to judge.

All she can do is to drop on her knees and pray, and so praying and kneeling she moves not, till the mist that grows up in the sea, or the mist that has already filled her own imperfect sight, takes, perhaps kindly, away from her, and for ever, all further power of recognition of the particular

ship that holds him. It is lost among the crowd of ships, as he will be lost, she thinks, for her among the crowd of humanity.

She sits down, and buries her face in her hands, and weeps as if she would gladly weep all her life away.

The poor woman's heart seems dying. She could not say so to her poor boy ; but what share can she have in his far-off hopes ?

‘No, no ; if he comes not back till then he will find me in my grave !’

Thus she talks and sobs to herself, and rocks to and fro, and hour after hour passes with her, and still she cannot make up her mind to go home, face Israel's anger, and tell him of David's departure.

One fearful moment came when all things seemed so overwhelming, that before she knew what she was doing, she had risen, and presently found herself looking down into the depths of the sea, longingly, as if they too should take her, as they had taken David.

Suddenly her whole frame thrills and shudders, as a voice like that of doom sounds from behind her.

‘Woman, what hast thou done with him? Where is David—my son?’

Summoning up all that remained to her of power to think and speak, and commending her soul to God for what might happen afterwards, she said, gasping for breath, and pausing between every few words—

‘He is gone!’

‘Gone!’

‘He could not—face—the court—and expose all his humiliation. He made a friend of one of the captains who trade here, and this morning the ship has taken him away. Oh Israel—husband—my heart is broken—forgive me—if—’

She could not wait, happily, for the answer he would have given, the blow perhaps he would have inflicted, for she fainted, and Israel had for the next few hours a new case on his hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

DOES MARGARET KNOW?

AMONG those who heard vaguely, and as it were afar off, of the pitiable events just recorded, and which began to fill the whole country side for many miles round with the noise of the ever-increasing strife, there was one man who would gladly have interposed, and at some risk to himself have endeavoured to shame the two combatants into a more Christian-like mood and behaviour.

But unhappily for Rees Thomas's desire to be useful, he is still a prisoner at his lodging; recovering it is true, but so slowly, that even the fact of improvement has been till now doubtful.

And apart from that and the physical depression involved, apart also from the consideration that up to the time of the accident he knew nothing—and after that only heard vaguely of—the attack

on David by the Squire, and subsequently, of the retaliation inflicted by Israel, his own mental troubles for once so pre-occupy him that he lacks both the energy and the faith that are necessary to him when embarking in a difficult cause for the service of others.

It saddens him, indeed, with a deeper sadness than he has yet known, to reflect how all the religious earnestness and active impulses for work he has been accustomed to feel seem to have died away.

His weak body seems to him at times like a tenement where angels and saints have communed with his soul, and made their temporary lodging, but which has gradually become so worthless, that the holy and celestial visitants have at last fled, never to return.

It so happened that his first day of assured convalescence was the same as that which witnessed the departure of David. Dr. Jolliffe came in, in a great hurry as usual, felt the pulse, looked at the tongue, asked about the places which had been burned (they no longer needed his looking at them), and having got his answers, said as he put on his hat :—

‘I beg you to accept my heartfelt congratulations, Friend Thomas.’

‘Indeed!’ said the latter, with a gentle but melancholy smile stealing over his face. ‘Why?’

‘Because you have got rid of me. Good-day.’

And tarrying no further question, away went Dr. Jolliffe; who, if the truth must be told, was a bit of a diplomatist, and perhaps wished to give the collier preacher no opportunity to speak of the delicate questions of fee or reward.

He little guessed what a storm his words raised in Rees Thomas’s heart. The time, then, had come! That time he had so much yearned for, even while he so much feared it. Margaret must now be spoken to.

He had been busy when the doctor came in, making notes for a sermon that he hoped some day or other to be permitted to preach; and in which he had got so deeply interested that tears were in the eyes that looked up to see who entered.

Perhaps Dr. Jolliffe had seen these and been moved by them, and found it necessary to cut short his visit, or very much lengthen it—which happened then to be impossible.

When the doctor had gone, Rees Thomas again took up his one and only quill pen, worn down till it could be no longer mended, and endeavoured to go on with his sermon.

Alas! the whole spirit of it had evaporated in these last few minutes. So after vain attempts to get up some fresh energy by reading aloud, over and over again, what he had done, he put down the paper tremulously, and murmured to himself:—

‘Why all this hypocrisy? Will it mend the matter in any way? The time has come. She must be spoken to. May the Lord give me courage to resist my own selfish heart, and to think only of what is best for her, which cannot be otherwise than best for me. That is what I must teach myself. That is what I must rely on.’

He began to walk up and down the room; but even in that simple occupation seemed to find a something that troubled the natural simplicity and frankness of his character, and feed the irritability that had grown upon him during the last day or two.

‘How many times to-day have I not done this

same thing, for the same object, but without the manliness to avow it, or to wrestle with it, if it is, in truth, a matter to be ashamed of !’

And then, withdrawing the bandage that concealed the part of the face that had been burned, he gazed once more in the little old-fashioned mirror that hung on the wall, and seemed to try to measure the amount and character of the disfigurement.

It was in truth very bad. The wound was quite healed, the skin restored, but frightfully wrinkled, and of so deep-fixed and livid a colour as to preclude all hope of any material amelioration in the future.

He had been so sensitive concerning this matter all through his prolonged illness, that once when Margaret’s mother happened to be unable to dress the wound, he positively refused to let it be dressed at all for the time; and this refusal was given so curtly in answer to Margaret’s gentle request to be permitted to do it for him, that the poor girl felt at once silenced, and put to shame for her boldness. Consequently, whatever she might have heard from her mother, who was a

taciturn sort of person, and as likely as not to have said nothing about it of any consequence, she had never seen what was the effect left behind after the healing of the burns.

He was angry with himself, as he reviewed this folly. But for that she would have known, if not the worst, still enough to be prepared for the worst. And he would have known how she was influenced by it, and so have been spared the fears that tortured him now, when action of some kind must take place.

Yes, it was quite out of the question his remaining here any longer, unless—but no—he would not deceive himself—there was—could be no hope. It was not in human nature for a young maiden to look with any other feeling than aversion upon that which he now looked on. She might love him well enough theoretically for a time, but—Why he felt he almost abhorred himself—as if he could no longer recognise himself—while his eye rested on the features before him in the glass.

He *must* let her see him in all his deformity. He must *not* let her see what that would cost him.

Then a few words of kind, and manly, and Christian explanation, and they would separate in hope, aim, communion of spirit, for ever, so far as concerned their worldly lives.

Should he take off the wrapping before or after she should come in? Should he meet her thus without preparing her beforehand? or should he give some slight, but sufficient warning?

The shock of the one method might not only be great for her, but overpower him. Still he wanted the truth, however painful.

But would such an unexpected revelation fairly express the truth? Would he not afterwards be entangling himself in a thousand metaphysical subtleties, in the endeavour to decide how much of the emotion she might display would have been due to natural unsophisticated feeling, telling him the simple, however bitter truth; and how much to the unnatural circumstances in which he placed her by the surprise and suddenness of the spectacle?

He felt heart-sick as he revolved these ideas, and found no guiding light come, no clear sense of duty, none of the old fervent inspiration, that

sooner or later was sure to come in prayer, or after prayer, and set him on his way rejoicing.

Well, he thought at last, those who can't see their way must feel their way. And then he knocked with his hand against the wainscot, the usual signal when he wanted anything.

He fell to shaking like a leaf in the wind, as the door opened; it was not Margaret, however, who entered, but her mother.

‘Would you ask Margaret to come to me for a minute?’ said Rees Thomas, in as indifferent a tone as he could assume.

The old woman's face looked brighter than usual as she said a word or two expressive of her gladness to hear the doctor's account of him, and then turned to fetch her daughter.

‘Mrs. Doubleday!’ It was the earnest voice of the lodger who thus arrested her steps. He walked towards her, where she stood against the edge of the open door, holding the knob in her hand, took the latter gently from her fingers, and, very much to her amazement, closed the door as softly as he could, before again speaking. ‘Does your daughter—does Margaret know how much

I am altered, how disfigured, and I fear for life? ’

‘ Oh yes, Mr. Thomas ; I told her when you first came home the burn was quite awful, that I was almost overpowered with it ; and it was but yesterday, when I was saying how much better you looked, that she asked me if the marks were going away ; and I couldn’t but hold up my hand at her, for supposing such a thing.’

‘ Thank you ; I understand. You acted wisely. Please now let her come to me. I shall not detain her long. I have much to do and think of to-day.’

He then turned, and walked towards his table and sat down, apparently to his sermon, so that she might not tarry, nor again speak to him.

With a kind of half laugh, that yet seemed at any moment ready to change into tears of anguish and despair, he communed with himself, when he saw he was alone,—

‘ How like children we fret and fume and invent a thousand petty tricks and ingenious subtleties, to do, or not to do, something on which our hearts or our interests are deeply set ; heedless

the while how He who disposes of all things is driving us, as the shepherd drives his sheep, to the one and only fold—the truth, as it is in Him, and in His laws for the governance of us all ! Oh God, how wouldst thou not laugh at our follies and self-punishings, but that the love which is in Thee—nay, which is Thee—can but pity thy poor erring, lost children, lost but for Thee and thy dear Son !’

Well he knew now what to do. He took off the bandage, and nervously resumed his seat.

Then he rose, stepped hastily to the blind and drew it down a little, to darken the room.

Ashamed of the movement the moment it was made, he drew it up again, and once more sat down.

The door opened, and a soft step was heard inside the room. It paused ; then the closing of the door was heard, and the soft step advanced.

Rees Thomas rose, but could not look round ; he could only say with an attempt at cheeriness of voice, as he placed a chair for her,

‘Come and sit down, Margaret.’

She came, sat down ; he turned with a faint

smile on his face, expecting to meet her eyes, and see in them his own life's happiness or misery at once revealed—not that he doubted which, but that he was bound to wait her judgment, not assume it beforehand.

But he saw eyes cast down, a sweet modest flush of colour on the face, and a something, he hardly knew what, of flurry in the dress, especially about the hair, that seemed to say Margaret had been striving to make the best use of the brief moments she had had, between the message and her obedience to it, to adorn herself.

He felt in the bitterness of his heart he could almost chide in her the frivolity of the whole sex, that even when there was nothing they could care to gain, were still bent on obtaining homage, careless as to the consequences to their victims.

‘Margaret!’ he said in a deep and agitated tone, finding she neither spoke nor raised her head, and seeming, he thought, each moment to become less capable of doing either.

Then she lifted her eyes; the light was full on his face, but not so strong but that he was able to see the change in hers, the sudden painful shrinking

of those blue orbs, and which spread to her whole frame, the pallor, the confusion of thought and feeling, and then the consciousness of all she was revealing to him.

He bore the look, however, as a martyr might have borne it, in standing before an inexorable but, so far as his light went, just judge; and seeing in the eyes of the latter that the verdict was being given against him.

A moment more, and Margaret could no longer restrain herself; she wrung her hands, cried aloud as if for relief, and turning towards the back of her chair, leaned on it, and gave herself up to the anguish she could no longer repress.

The unselfish nobility of the man's character now shone grandly out. Her very distress and abandonment to it warned him he too must not also give way. He put aside his own cruel mortification; he thought no more of love; his one aim and hope was simply to comfort this poor maiden, and spare her the shock which would by-and-by come to her on thinking over her behaviour, unless he in the meantime took the sting out of it by his considerate forethought.

To be as a friend, nay, as a brother to her, and yet to make her understand, without saying so, she had nothing more to fear about his love; that the past was gone utterly; that in a word she was free, and might be sure he would be happy to see her happy, even in marriage with another, should she meet with one worthy of her—these were the things he had to do, alike for her peace and his own.

He waited till he saw the worst of the storm had passed over, then he again breathed gently the word

‘Margaret!’

‘Yes,’ she responded in a soft melancholy tone, that seemed to express more of a sigh than a word.

‘You find me much changed?’

There was a slight pause before he again heard sounds from the faint lips:

‘Oh, what you must have suffered!’

‘We will not dwell on that now. It was not my desire—that is, I should say, I very much desired not to shock you—’

‘Oh, Mr. Rees Thomas, don’t speak so, don’t!

I know you will never be able to forgive me! I don't deserve it. I am so ashamed of myself.'

'Margaret, you must not say that; you have no occasion. I owe everything in the world to you, and your mother—apart, that is, from God's mercies towards me.'

'And do not I owe more, infinitely more than that to you; for those mercies you speak of were of little account to my darkened soul till you made me see them, understand them, feel them. Oh, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Thomas'—she stopped, lifted her eyes to heaven as if seeking light and direction there to tell her what she ought now to do, then, before he could arrest her, she had knelt down at his feet, and with her clasped hands resting on his knees besought him to think no more of what had happened just now, and ended by passionately supplicating him for pardon.

Seeing reasoning was useless, Rees Thomas did not attempt to explain to her that he felt more inclined to ask pardon from her for even temporarily defacing the fair prospect of a happy life that lay before her, but answered in her own spirit,—

'Margaret, I do forgive any pain you may

have given me, as I hope my Maker will forgive me the infinite sorrow I must have caused Him !’

He then raised her, made her dry her eyes, and sit down again, while he prepared to fulfil that part of his task which remained to him—the hardest of all, the one that had so bowed down his soul, ever since the doctor had released him from his professional bondage.

‘ Now, Margaret, we must come to business. And I ask you, for my sake, to consider carefully before you speak, and possibly remonstrate ; because I am bound to say this is a matter I alone can decide, and I have made my decision. It was to tell you that, I asked your presence here.’

Whatever Margaret might have thought about his message before she came in, or however deeply she might have been moved since by all that had passed, Rees Thomas did not know, dared not guess, and strove as far as possible not even to think of.

But there was something in her pained look, in the darkening colour of her brow, and in the moistening of her lips with her tongue, as if conscious of the dry, hard tone in which she was about

to speak, that betokened at once pride, reserve, and disappointment.

‘I shall do my best to satisfy you,’ she said; then said no more.

‘You see, Margaret, you are young, beautiful, and in all respects one that any man might be proud to win for his wife. You do not think much of these things, I know. But I, your friend, am bound to think of them.’

‘You are very good!’ said Margaret, almost, he thought, in a tone of irony.

‘There can be no harm in my saying that my love for you, while it was received through your great goodness as legitimate, was a sufficient reason for my staying here.’

‘Oh indeed!’ ejaculated Margaret with an odd kind of smile, while her pretty feet began to beat the floor impatiently, as if she and they knew what all this was coming to, and the sooner it was over the better.

‘And then during my illness, when our relations’—he paused in inability for a moment to speak, yet restraining all other show of emotion.

‘When our relations?’ she repeated; and he felt

her eyes were fixed on his face, and that yet he had to go on.

‘When I—I—saw the necessity through my accident for a change in our relations, I could not for the time help myself. But then the world knows that, and so your character cannot suffer.’

‘I am glad of that!’ said Margaret, and looking almost as if she meant what she said.

‘But now, were I to stay on, that would not be so. Enough is known of my—my feelings towards you—what they were, I mean—to make it wrong, decidedly wrong, and in every way disadvantageous to you. Don’t you see that? No, do not answer, not now. You will see it by-and-by. And then you will do me justice, whatever now may be your judgment.’

‘You, then, wish to leave?’

‘Why, to tell you the truth, I have already so far arranged that I have only to speak, and my friend the farmer will be ready to receive me at an hour’s notice.’

‘I asked you if you wished to leave?’

‘You press me unkindly, Margaret!’ And he

could not prevent a tear from glistening in his eye, or her from seeing it.

‘Am I, then, to go to my mother, and say, “Mother, Mr. Rees Thomas is going away, but doesn’t know whether he wishes to go or not?”’

‘Margaret, this is cruel. You know’—

‘What do I know?’

‘That I love you—aye, a thousand times better than I ever did before, and that you can no longer love me.’

The colour was again swiftly mounting to her cheek; her eyes were full of timid yet joyous light; if they saw the blemished face, it no longer troubled them. There was a brief silence; then in the lowest, sweetest accents surely ever heard by mortal ears, she answered,

‘Is that true that you first said?’

How could Rees Thomas answer, except from the ground at her feet, and which he did not leave till she had assured him of a love far too deep to be destroyed by the accidents of life?

‘Had I been your wife,’ she said, with an infusion of scarlet on her cheeks, to hear her own lips pronounce the word, ‘what would every

honest and true-hearted woman have said of me, if my love had deserted you at your utmost need? Believe me, Mr. Thomas, if your calamity has changed me at all, it is to that which you will have no cause to complain of.'

She leaned down. Their arms, lips, souls met, and for a brief space the lovers knew that the idea of happiness on earth was no fable or dream, but a reality surpassing all imaginings.

And then, when they could speak together again, Rees Thomas warned her of what must happen, thus loving and living together; but she too had foreseen that. And so it was settled that before he began again to work, and exercise his renewed dignity of Deputy, they should be married.

CHAPTER XX.

SUNSHINE.

It is a custom in Wales to make wedding presents, but which naturally, among very poor people, amount to little more than kindly recognition of the event.

But in the present case the custom led to a result little anticipated by the parties most interested—the pouring in upon them of so many gifts from friends and acquaintances, known or unknown, that they felt themselves suddenly raised from very poor to comparatively very rich people.

Their position was so well known, and his character so highly appreciated, while his personal misfortune and his successful love interested so many among the richer classes, that more than common care was exercised in the choice of the

presents, through a sort of friendly but unacknowledged committee ; of which Mr. and Mrs. Griffith Williams were the prime movers, and who managed to make the affair the occasion of a little dramatic surprise.

The entrance of Mr. Griffith Williams on this business was too characteristic to be passed over in silence. Some time before the occurrence of the injury to Rees Thomas by the Fall in the mine, he had heard of the quarrel between him and his employer Israel, and guessed at the cause, their difference about the beginning work daily at the mine with morning prayers.

All his own vivid impressions of the conversation overheard by him at the mouth of the pit, and then the talk with Israel at the bottom, when it was discovered that the Deputy had rebelled, and was actually engaged in the very religious service that had just been forbidden to him—all this came back to Griffith so freshly, and assumed such new interest on account of his own bitter quarrels with Israel, that he suddenly made up his mind to call at Rees Thomas's lodgings.

He did this in the belief that his only object

was to see if he could promote the interest of a man whom he was so much inclined to esteem; and taking no account of his secret thirst to hear about the doings at the mine, which he hardly expected would prove creditable to his enemy.

He found not Rees Thomas, the Deputy, whom he sought, but a young woman of striking beauty, and equally striking pallor, who curtsied as he entered, and in reply to the stranger's questions said Mr. Rees Thomas was away, but was expected home.

There was something in her look and in the aspect of the place that sent a chill through the heart of Griffith—she seemed, he thought, literally starving.

By degrees he got her story from her, which was simple and sad enough. She and her mother lived on a bare pittance, saved out of the wreck of former prosperity while her father lived. This they eked out by letting lodgings, and got on very well, when the rent was paid. Now and for a long time Mr. Rees Thomas had lived with them, but more as a friend than a lodger.

For the moment Griffith wondered if the Deputy

took advantage of their good opinion of him to act unworthily. But she went on to say that when in work Mr. Thomas was the most regular of paymasters—in fact often assisting them besides in their need.

After Mr. Thomas—whose name, he observed, she never mentioned except in a tone that implied how deep was her reverence for him—had been discharged by Mr. Israel Mort, he had never been able to obtain for any length of time a similar situation. Everybody spoke well of him, but no one cared to employ him in a post of authority, lest he might make the men insubordinate by his peculiar religious ideas.

‘ You see, sir, he never was very strong, and mother—and—and his other friends have often begged him not to work as a collier ; and he has been so kind as to think of them and not do it. And with the help of the Almighty we have all three managed somehow to get on all through these years ; but I do believe his heart is broken at last, for he wrote yesterday, saying he should come back, and ask Israel Mort to let him work among his old comrades as a simple collier, and

be content with such pious communion with them as he could get outside the mine.' Mr. Williams paused a moment before he answered her,—

'I am going to see Mr. Jenkyns (a large mine owner of the district) on business, and should I find an opening, will try to do your husband a good turn. He might speak to Israel Mort, which I could not, and so make the business less painful.'

'No, Sir ; but thank you all the same. You do not know Mr. Mort. He is one of those men who are always the worse, the more you try to get at them by any but the straight road.'

'Could you lodge a young friend of mine for a few days, if only till your husband's return, if you have not a spare room? He has come down unexpectedly and my house is full.'

'Oh sir, the place is too mean ! Yes, indeed, we have a spare bedroom and bed ; but, in truth, we have had to part with so many things, that I could not make him comfortable. No, indeed, sir !'

'Will you mind my seeing the bedroom ?'

She looked as if she did mind,—that it was

useless and painful,—that he would be sure to reject it, but led the way up-stairs, like one used to obedience and disappointment, to a room that charmed Griffith by the prospect, and by the remembrance of a fact of which he said nothing to her, but which was of extreme interest to him—it was the very room he had occupied while yet a mere ploughman, earning his fifteen shillings a week. With companions, or books, he had had many a happy hour in it, so he insisted it was all right ; and, as to other matters, why she had better purchase whatever she felt really indispensable, and they could consider the outlay afterwards, when they came to the rent.

The artifice was palpable enough, but there was something so winning in the Squire's countenance and manner, so determined in his intention that his friend should stay there, and so grateful to her in the deference and respect with which he spoke of Rees Thomas, as if he half suspected on her part a more than friendly sentiment towards him, that she felt it difficult to resist ; and when she thought of the comfort it might be to Mr. Thomas on his return to find such a man there, one whom

he could talk to, she could not but express a grateful acceptance.

Griffith put five pounds into her hand, the whole of which was to be laid out to the best advantage in provisions and indispensable necessities, but laid out at once—the morrow was to be left to care for itself.

‘But if Mr. Thomas be angry with me?’ said the poor girl in alarm. ‘He must know you do this for his sake’—

‘And yours,’ interjected the Squire.

She coloured a little, but merely remarked,

‘He is as proud as he is poor, Sir.’

‘He’ll forgive you for my sake.’

Strange to say, the young friend, after all, did not come, though a message from the Squire did, a day or two later, to apologise; and requesting her to use what she had bought and what trifle of money might remain, and to leave him her creditor for a guest at some future time.

Invaluable had been the help thus rendered; for, as has already been shown, Rees Thomas did come back from his unsuccessful search for em-

ployment, and in the lowest depth of poverty and depression.

Remembering these things, and hearing how Rees Thomas had gone to work as a simple collier, and so incurred a life-long disfigurement, he felt he had a greater right than ever to detest Israel Mort for permitting it, and to show his sympathy for the victim. The marriage gave him an opportunity.

When the event began to be talked of among the colliers and the artisans of the neighbourhood, with whom Rees Thomas enjoyed perhaps more respect than popularity, some of his religious acquaintances among the working men began to raise a subscription; but kept the affair strictly private, fearing if he who was to benefit by it heard what they were doing, he would put a decided veto on the business.

One of these friendly artisans called upon the Squire to ask for a contribution. Some talk took place, and it was arranged that the subscription should be vigorously pursued, so that the number of persons contributing might make the compliment the more impressive; and that the money

obtained being brought to him, he would make a noticeable addition, and so be able to carry out a little plan he had been contriving, and which he explained, to the great interest and satisfaction of the collector.

The marriage feast was to be held at the house of Morris, Rees Thomas's farmer friend, on the plea that the cottage of the Doubledays could by no means accommodate all those who had a right to be present.

Knowing this, the chief plotter, Mr. Griffith Williams, with his wife and Nest as delighted on-lookers playing the part of Chorus to the whole proceedings, saw that a considerable portion of the wedding day would be available for the meditated proceedings. Mrs. Griffith had already secured a traitor in the household in the person of Margaret's mother; and through the facilities and aid she gave, they got drawn up an inventory of every article of furniture in the place, small or large, with notes appended showing its state of preservation, appearance, etc.

They were helped in the concealment, which was half the charm of the whole affair, by the fact

that on the morning of the day of marriage, the presents that were expected, in accordance with the usual custom, appeared; and were laid out in the one reception room, that where Rees Thomas always sat when writing or studying.

Snowy linen, pretty tea and dinner services, silver tea spoons, &c. &c. &c., were there all duly displayed.

These were examined with real pleasure by Margaret, and calmly approved of by her future lord and master; and so apparently the business ended.

But in truth the best of it had yet to begin. No sooner were they off to church than there came rapidly driving up a large empty cart, with Griffith's groom sitting beside the driver, a broad grin on his face and a paper in his hand.

Guided by this, every condemned article of the household was fetched out, till in fact only a few of the best were left behind. Meantime another vehicle, a roomy van, had come slowly up the steep road, being heavily laden, and accompanied by a couple of helpers, who carefully unloaded it, and displayed to the wondering eyes of the neigh-

bours handsome chests of drawers, always the central objects in a collier's idea of a well-furnished home; a bookcase, a tall eight-day clock for the kitchen, and a little one for the parlour mantel-piece; new beds and bedding, and chamber furniture; easy chairs, muslin curtains, ornamental plant-boxes for the windows filled with plants in full flower, a work table for Margaret fitted with every convenience, a writing table with drawers for Rees Thomas; and so on, down to the smallest articles required even for the humblest use.

All the things belonging to the inside were rapidly got into place, and then the great clock was set ticking solemnly, while the flower boxes were fixed outside the windows; and so all was ready for the return of the bride and bridegroom.

A gardener had been at work for some hours in the garden, and made a little Eden of it with fresh turf, a blooming bed of geraniums edged with mignonette, and the border weeded, and newly planted with variegated evergreen shrubs for winter display.

And thus one of the dullest, though always one of the cleanest of little cottages, was suddenly

transformed, as by the wave of a fairy's wand, into the brightest, cosiest, most luxurious little home in the world, so far as regarded the wants, wishes, and tastes of the parties concerned.

Fortunately they returned while there was yet sufficient daylight, for the full effect to be seen and appreciated.

Margaret was the first to cry out in a tone of such joyous surprise, that her husband looked at her to see what was the matter.

‘Oh don't you see? don't you see?’ she exclaimed.

Then he looked towards the home they were approaching, and did see the outward and visible signs of some strange transformation.

The tears sprang to his eyes. Nothing could be sweeter to him under such circumstances than the refined, half-poetic suggestions conveyed by the aspect of the little garden, of the two windows one over the other, belonging respectively to his sitting room and to their bed room, both half embowered in foliage and bloom, and both revealing delicately white curtains within.

But what was the amazement of both on going

into their old familiar place, and finding the changes wrought there!

Alternately laughing and crying, Margaret went from one object to another, calling repeatedly to Rees Thomas to come and look,—

‘Oh, do come!’ But not waiting for him, she flew on into the kitchen, where her mother was watching with open arms; then after one rapturous embrace and a fresh gush of bright water drops, she glides upstairs, to her mother’s bed room first, to find that too all her womanly heart could desire, then into the bridal chamber, where the first glance was sufficient. She dropped on the nearest chair, put her hands to her eyes, but only to restrain the sense of happiness, almost too great, of a heart far too full.

Where was Rees Thomas all this while?

Sitting down in his new easy chair, in front of his new writing table, opening the drawers on each side, and closing them again, for a minute or two, as if these things were a reality, all the rest a dream.

After that minute or two, he went to his new bookcase, wondering what had become of his

books, but found them all there, with others costly and most precious—books he had coveted with no earthly hope of ever possessing, books of infinite value to one whose education had been all his own work, and through a thousand difficulties ; therefore of most imperfect character.

But he did not even touch these now. He wanted his pocket bible ; and was half in alarm lest that, like so many other of his shabby household gods, should have been improved out of existence. But no ; he found it, and went back, sat down, and began to read in it ; but evidently did so as a question of soul-discipline, of pious gratitude, of desire to tread down under feet by its aid those swellings of the heart that threatened to carry him he knew not whither, as he thought of those who had so changed his home to-day.

But who were they ?

He hears, as if in answer to a question that he had only put to himself in silent communion, sounds of stifled laughter ; then he hears Margaret's voice, then an opening of doors, and a rush of sounds and of feet ; and presently he is surrounded by a group of familiar faces, conspicuous

among whom are Mr. and Mrs. Griffith Williams, and little Nest, her excitement bubbling over in silvery peals of mirth. There too is his farmer friend, who had been kept in ignorance, till the last hour or two, of the little plot. And there is Dr. Jolliffe, who, with a bright smile and a genial clasp of hands, has to hurry away.

And then came in two of Mr. Williams's servants with trays bearing the contents of certain hampers they had just unpacked in the kitchen; and though neither Rees Thomas nor Margaret could eat or drink anything, no one found them out; the supper was to everybody else a most enjoyable one.

As to the Squire, the occasion seemed to develop quite an unknown side of his character. Without putting off the gentleman, he was so amusing, sympathetic, jovial, and frank, that it was hardly possible to resist the belief he had erred in accepting solitude when dissatisfied with his reception in the society he had sought to belong to.

One thing alone jarred on his enjoyment of the evening. In devising the scheme that had been so well carried out, he had remembered not only the higher social standing that a man like Rees

Thomas was entitled to, but also his own great desire to show Rees Thomas how indignant he felt at Israel's brutal tyranny, and how much he admired the stand he made against him. And then he meant to offer his own aid in obtaining employment elsewhere.

But when he spoke on the subject to Rees Thomas, at the moment the little impromptu party was breaking up, he was disconcerted and excessively annoyed to discover, what he had not previously known or suspected, that the two were again friendly, the prayers about to be resumed, under Rees Thomas as Deputy.

After that he could not touch on the question of David, as he had intended. And he took leave of Rees Thomas, with an effort to keep up the cordiality of the evening, that only told himself how the doings of the day had suddenly lost all their flavour, and that the sooner he forgot them the better.

Rees Thomas in part saw this, and grieved, but it was no time to speak, and he had too much cause for happiness to be willing to mar it now.

When all but himself, his wife, and her mother

had gone away, they knelt down in prayer ; and Rees Thomas poured forth all the emotion and gratitude of his heart for the past, all his aspirations for their common future, in language at once so homely and so touching, that it was accompanied by tears and sobs throughout, but most happy ones ; and when he ended there came from each of the listeners in one fervent word, all they cared to say, or desired,

‘ Amen ! Amen ! ’

CHAPTER XXI.

SHADE.

THE work of reparation of the mine now went on so vigorously, seemed so thoroughly to occupy Israel's whole soul, as to leave him neither time nor inclination to attend to what all his neighbours had supposed must prove an overwhelming calamity, the departure of David, to seek his way in the world, alone and friendless.

After the first shock of his violence, Mrs. Mort had found him hear her account of the business with more patience and good feeling than she had dared to hope for. Indeed, as her prostration of mind and body became plain to him, he ministered to her by kindly acts, though he did not use kindly words.

Once only he broke through the impassive front

he had maintained after the first few hours of knowledge, and said to her,

‘David will probably come back. If so, and he says anything at all satisfactory as regards the future, I shall wash out the past as I wipe out these memoranda from my slate.’ And with a sponge he cleaned the slate carefully before again speaking. ‘But I hereby warn you never to mention his name to me again, till he does. From this time I also wipe out and make clean my mind of him, as this slate is clean—aye, that I will, even to the very recollection of him, for any or all practical purposes!’

What could she say or do, but just what she had always to say or do—submit?

And then Israel went to work as if the very attempt of circumstances to impede him for the moment made him only move on with redoubled force afterwards.

The day came, so long looked for by Mrs. Jehoshaphat, the day of her visit to see at work all the labourers in the busy hive of industry that her money alone now maintained, while she could

see them—that is, while the works were going on at the surface, or were, to some extent, visible from it.

Everything regarding the transit, from her eyrie on the mountain ledge down to the mine-mouth, was managed to her entire satisfaction, and with no perceptible jar to her nerves, or injury to her aged and weak frame.

But then she was in such spirits, that it would have required a somewhat rude jar or decided injury to affect her. Never was there a woman with whom the value, or comfort, or happiness of the passing hour, depended more on the quality of the existing mood, which too was usually passing, even while one gazed on its manifestations or effects.

She had dressed herself in gorgeous attire: a crimson velvet robe, seal-skin jacket, and swans-down boa round her neck; a bonnet indescribable for size, the variety of its colours, and the rarity of the pendent flowers that hung from it, and which the most skilful botanist would have found it difficult to assign to their right place in the Linnæan, the natural, or any other system. She

wore yellow kid gloves, and rings over them on every finger. She was the queen of the day, and felt quite equal to all demands for queenliness of costume and behaviour that could be made upon her.

They carried her in an easy chair, taken from her own room, down the steep, winding, and dangerous descent, at the bottom of which a Bath chair awaited her; and in this she was drawn gently and carefully over the inequalities of the way, towards the mine.

The moment she was within sight of the place, her ears were greeted by a great shout, and her eyes, by the display of waving hats and handkerchiefs, and gay flags, and she soon discovered what previously she had neither known nor suspected, that Israel had passed the word round among the colliers, and the colliers' wives and sweethearts and daughters, that there was to be a bit of a public ceremony at the laying of the first stone of the masonry around the pit mouth, and that he wished a good reception to be given to Mrs. Jehoshaphat, who was coming.

The cries of welcome from the voices of the multitude, who, in their holiday costume, and with such a mingling of the sexes presented a somewhat picturesque appearance, was immediately afterwards taken up by an amateur band playing an inspiriting march.

Israel advanced to meet her, to receive a most cordial shake of the hand, and to see the tears of pride in the old lady's eyes, as she said—

‘This is a surprise, Israel Mort. Ah! I see you have learned to sound the depths of the old fool's weakness, and, shall I say, to take advantage of her?’

‘Say it by all means, ma'am, if you think it, or if it will comfort you!’

‘But, Israel, what do you think, man?’ exclaimed the old lady with a joyous laugh. ‘The doctor actually and positively forbade this expedition, and said he washed his hands of the business altogether, if I did. And here I am, feeling so well, that I can't but ask which is the biggest old woman, Dr. Jolliffe or me?’

‘Well ma'am, I am sorry to hear so decided an opinion from the doctor; but however, as you say,

here you are, and it must be our business to take care you shan't be able to say so for long.'

'Oh, you mean to send me quickly back, do you? That'll depend, Israel Mort, that'll depend!'

He wasted no time in contention, for he knew that could not benefit her now. So he set the artisans to work again, whom her coming had interrupted.

While he was thus engaged, she turned eagerly and impatiently round, now in this direction now in that, to see here the great stack of props for the interior, there masons at work on the masonry for the exterior; here the yawning gulf of the new shaft, already far advanced to completion; there the similar gulf of the old one, with the cage incessantly going up and down with materials; here the long array of gigantic beams, to form the spears of the new pump; there an enormous pile of bricks, for particular portions of the roofing below; here empty waggons going away, there loaded waggons coming up.

When Israel rejoined her, she could not but notice a certain gravity in his face, which she had by this time learned to read so well, as to know

that if it ever did express anything particular it was because its owner chose that it should, and indeed compelled it to do so.

‘What’s the matter, man? Pray don’t dash my spirits to day. You can’t have any news to tell me that must be told now, or that can be so very important as to matter when it’s told.’

‘No, ma’am, but I want to say a word and then it’s done with, and I will wait your good pleasure.’

‘What is the word?’

‘This: you have provided me with money freely, handsomely, as I wanted it, and I didn’t like to ask you to put into the bank, once for all, enough for the job.’

‘Of course you didn’t like to ask me, nor should I have done it if you had.’

‘Suppose, ma’am, anything were to happen while things are in this state?’

‘Happen! to me?’

‘Yes, ma’am.’ Mrs. Jehoshaphat’s face visibly paled, and the pallor increased to such a deadly hue, that for the moment Israel feared he had all unconsciously touched a dangerous chord of fear

in her heart. But when she spoke, which she could not do for a little time on account of her ever-present enemy, the cough, it was to pour out a torrent of anger and almost of imprecations at him who had first suggested the visit.

He stood quiet, submissive under the storm, saying nothing to irritate her, trusting to what he had before seen of her good sense, which always came to her aid before she had very much committed herself. So it proved now. She stopped, and for a while there was a spell of grim silence. Then she said—

‘I suppose what you are driving at is, that if I die before these works are finished, you may not be able to get the money to go on, is that it?’

‘Exactly, ma’am! But I hope you see that if you kindly take steps to prevent that, you won’t live a year, or an hour the less; perhaps indeed, by making me easy, I may do a little to—’

‘Right! right! confound you, Israel Mort, you are always in the right! Can’t you manage to get at what you want, and let me, for once in the way, when we differ, seem to have the best of the argument?’

‘I’ll try, ma’am!’

She burst out laughing as she said—

‘I know you will. Here’s my hand. Come to me to-morrow, and you shan’t leave till the proper sum is arranged and provided, so that whatever “happens” as you say, you shall be safe.’

‘Say the mine, ma’am! It’s that that I want to see safe.’

‘Very well, and mind in future, when one gets to my age and state, they don’t like to be told suddenly of what may “happen.” It’s an ugly word, and it shook me.’

‘I am really sorry, very sorry! But you don’t feel any the worse now I hope?’

‘No, I think not, but I shan’t wait for the laying of the stone.’

‘Surely you will. It’ll soon be over.’

‘Very well,’ she said, with an air of lassitude, while still striving to look round and recover her interest in the spectacle. ‘Are they ready?’

‘They will be in a very few minutes. I will quicken them. There shall be no fuss, only a few words, a good hurra, and there an end.’

But he had not moved twenty yards away, be-

fore he heard a scream ; he turned and saw Mrs. Jehoshaphat's head lying on her breast, and shaking about as if its owner had lost all power of self-control.

He ran back, raised the aged head, tore off the bonnet, with its blaze of garish colours, and threw it on the ground. The movement loosened her long grey hair, which floated about in the wind. He saw she had fainted. He shouted for brandy or anything else that might be instantly obtainable. A collier's tea-can was handed to him as the only available thing. He tried to pour some down her partly open mouth, heard a gurgling of the throat, and all was over. Mrs. Jehoshaphat was dead.

CHAPTER XXII.

ISRAEL SURPRISED.

PEOPLE no longer talked of the fortunate Israel. The departure of David, and the death of his only supporter were blows sufficiently severe to have damaged even an older reputation for good luck than Israel Mort's. It soon became known that Mrs. Jehoshaphat had died without a will, and without making provision for the completion of the extensive works of reparation at the mine, and the consequences to Israel stared everyone in the face.

How would he act now? Where would he get capital? These questions naturally led to the further enquiry, What would become of Mrs. Jehoshaphat's property in the mine, and would the heirs carry out her intentions regarding it?

Consumed from this moment with secret and

ceaseless anxiety, Israel preserved what in any other man would have been called a cheerful aspect ; was as exact and exacting, as methodical and observant as ever. Judging from his behaviour one would say no thought ever crossed his mind of interruption to his government ; and therefore that no man in his employ need fancy he might relax in his labours, or be less careful of expenditure, or slacken in the precautions, now more than ever required for safety.

And now he found how invaluable were the services of Rees Thomas. The man's face, in spite of its disfigurement, seemed to have become transfigured with happiness. He grew stronger too ; more physically able to help Israel.

Thus it happened that the latter found it possible to be away from the mine day after day, sometimes for nearly a week together, while he was making herculean efforts to raise funds for the ever-recurring fortnightly wage-days, and to negotiate for the introduction of a sleeping partner, who would buy out Mrs. Jehoshaphat's heirs ; the Deputy, the while, in no respect departing from his ordinary humble quietude.

Whenever Mort returned from these wearying and depressing expeditions, he had only to go to the mine to draw new spirit and hope from the sight, for he found all things moving on exactly in the grooves he had made, and with no loss of force, but on the contrary with a very decided gain ; which came unexpectedly on Israel, and with most important consequences at a critical time.

To get the largest possible quantities of coal out of the mine in the shortest possible period, was the problem that had to be solved ; and it was on the character of the solution that depended Israel's chance of obtaining enough ready money to hold his ground unassisted till he could secure external relief, and, what was equally important, at a reasonable price.

He had, of course, stopped at once, on Mrs. Jehoshaphat's death, all the new works ; and confined himself to doing just so much, and no more, to the old ones, as would enable the ordinary business of coal-winning to go smoothly on.

But this would have been insufficient, and he must have succumbed, but for the ingenuity and

vigour of Rees Thomas ; who without any confidential talk with his employer, understood exactly where the shoe pinched, and how best to ease it ; and so managed matters with the men, that a sudden and large increase was made in the weekly produce of the mine, and time given to Israel to realise its value before he had to pay the necessarily increased earnings of the labourers.

He needed some such comfort, for he was again to be painfully surprised.

He often wondered how it was he could get no answer to his repeated applications to the solicitors who had the administration of Mrs. Jehoshaphat's property, and whom he had asked to continue the works she had begun, and pledged herself to continue ; but one day, when overcome with fatigue, and perhaps (though he would have hardly owned the fact even to himself) feeling to lose heart over the ceaseless harass of the fortnightly wage days ; he went into a public house, for the first time for a very long period, and called for a glass of ale, and bread and cheese.

Taking out his notes of people to call on who owed money to the mine owners ; or who might

become customers and be willing to pay at once tempted by liberal discount ; he, after a brief glance, put them by impatiently, and called for a newspaper.

Turning it over and over with that listless look that shows how little one thinks of it, news, politics, and advertisements being about equally unattractive to a man engrossed in fighting a terrible social battle of his own ; suddenly his eye brightens and flames, as if roused by some startling incident ; he at once stretches out the paper mechanically on the table, and standing, and leaning over it, reads with slow deliberate self-torture a long and showily displayed advertisement of the sale by auction of his own mine !

Having once read it all through he paused, and putting his hands over his eyes to shut out the light, and whatever else might disturb him, he remained for some minutes in that attitude, in intense thought, his body rocking a little to and fro, and his feet rising and falling with the movement.

Then he again glanced over the salient points of the advertisement, half mechanically, reading

of the valuable leasehold colliery known as Cwm Aber—railway sidings to the port—fourteen seams of coal of the aggregate thickness of fifty-seven feet or thereabout—coal well known in steam coal markets, and on the Admiralty list—one shaft in working order, another partly built—royalty moderate—lease renewable on moderate terms—machinery in good working order—cottages, stabling, and other buildings, &c. &c. &c. Also the very valuable rent-charge on the mine of three thousand a year, amply secured, and payable before any division of profits. ‘May be inspected on application to the Agent, Mr. Israel Mort, or Messrs. Johnes and Dynevor, solicitors, Leath.’

‘To Mr. Israel Mort, eh?—Agent!—’ he said aloud as he put the paper in his pocket, forgetting it was not his own. Then, after slowly finishing his meal, his first resolve was to go at once to the solicitors named in the advertisement, and demand by what right they proposed to sell the mine, instead of selling simply Mrs. Jehoshaphat’s shares.

It may be said at once, he had a great misgiving that somehow or other he had trusted too much to his own sagacity in his final arrangements with

the old lady ; and for that very reason he took the shortest, but possibly least prudent course in going at once to the enemy's camp, and risking the display of the strength or weakness of his position.

Messrs. Johnes and Dynevor were both in the room to which he was admitted, and appeared quite amused by his question, and instead of replying to it, Mr. Johnes asked,—

‘ You were a collier in the mine, I think ? ’

‘ Yes,’ said Israel, measuring the speaker with his eye, sternly.

‘ And then Deputy and Overman ? ’ chimed in Mr. Dynevor.

‘ Yes,’ said Israel, studying the new querist's face in the same hard, imperturbable fashion.

‘ Then pray how did you find the means to pay for that third share in the mine, which you now demand ? ’ again asked the same gentleman.

‘ I don't demand anything of the kind. I ain't such a fool ! ’ said Israel.

‘ What then ? ’ was the supercilious response of Mr. Johnes, while the partners exchanged a laugh.

Out of which they were unpleasantly shaken,

however, when Israel's fist came down on the morocco-covered writing-table with such violence as to set the inkstands and papers dancing, and to cause the virgin purity of the latter, including some very important documents just going away, to receive very serious stains. Nor were his accompanying words calculated to restore their complacent equability.

‘I came here to demand by what right you propose to sell my property without my consent. And if you don't choose to answer me, an injunction shall, before many hours are passed.’

The two gentlemen again exchanged glances, in which no particle of fun or humour was visible. Something was wrong evidently. So Mr. Dynevor, after a brief pause, said in a grave tone,

‘We don't at all understand, Mr. Mort. We have been told by the heirs that you have no rights whatever; that you had simply planted yourself on the old woman; but that when she went you went too, as far as they or their interests were concerned.’

Israel laughed, actually laughed, before beginning to rummage his capacious pockets, from

which he drew a paper, one he now always carried about with him, as needing on occasion to be shown to possible future partners.

It was simply a copy of his deed of partnership. This he placed before the two gentlemen, who, laying their heads together, began at once hurriedly to read it.

Israel quite enjoyed the spectacle their faces presented, lengthening and darkening every instant, not because they cared who were, or who were not, the true owners, but to see they had been so played with; and had, in consequence, made such asses of themselves before an acute, strong fellow like Israel Mort.

A half-stammered apology was offered and accepted; and so far Israel was victor. The two gentlemen undertook at once to modify the advertisement, acknowledging his third share. And Israel undertook to let them see the original agreement, 'a mere form,' they added, for satisfaction.

But his victory was to be dashed with a serious reverse.

Messrs. Johnes and Dynevor showed him—

and it was his turn then to be surprised and to look a little blank—a passage in the will of Mr. Jehoshaphat, in which he had anticipated that Mr. Griffith Williams might wish to dispose of the mine; and had absolutely forbidden it, without the consent of his wife, should she be living, or of her heirs after her death; his object being the better to guard the charge upon the mine in her favour of three thousand a year, which she was to enjoy and have the power to bequeath. It would seem from this, Mrs. Jehoshaphat, who was never remarkable for consistency, still desired to keep the mine in the family; whether in cynic enjoyment of its dubious value, or from the desire that they should do what he had declined doing, put their shoulders to the wheel as capitalists, and drag its notorious ill-fame out of the mud, who shall say?

‘So you see, Mr. Mort, nobody but Mrs. Jehoshaphat’s heirs can sell the mine as a whole,’ remarked Mr. Johnes, after a decent pause.

‘And does that prove that *they* can, if I resist?’ shrewdly asked Israel. ‘Remember I became proprietor *with her consent*, when the mine was

purchased *with her consent*, from Mr. Griffith Williams. So again I ask can the heirs sell without me?’

‘We think so, and should fight if our view was legally obstructed.’

‘And so ruin the property for both sides?’

‘Well, that does happen at times!’ said Mr. Johnes, with a smile, to which his partner assented by a loud laugh.

‘We may as well tell you that the late Mrs. Jehoshaphat has left a very large property indeed, inherited of course from her husband; that the heirs are thus able to spend money freely; and that they have taken a particular dislike to you—why we don’t pretend to say; but it’s as well you should see how the matter stands.’

Some conversation now took place on the prospects of the sale, which the solicitors thought looked gloomy. Even before seeing him they had not expected a very good price, but now if they were to offer only two-thirds of the property, they doubted if they should have a decent bid. Was he willing to let the whole be sold, and take his third in money from the proceeds,

and then arrange afterwards as he could with the buyer?

No ; Israel was not willing. He knew that mine, and he knew no other. It was his lawful wife, and he had no notion of divorce.

Seeing no more was to be got out of them, Israel went away ; saying to himself, 'That game won't do for me, nohow, and so I must bide the worst, and see what the auction brings forth.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DAY OF SALE.

NOT for many years could the oldest frequenters of the sale room of Mr. Lewis Williams at Leath remember an occasion that excited so much interest, or brought together so large an assemblage of spectators, and possible buyers, as the putting up to auction of the mine of Cwm Aber.

The great wealth of Mr. Jehoshaphat was only just beginning to be known, his wife's illnesses and oddities having concurred to delay administration to the will. This was one source of the public interest. Another was the critical position of Israel Mort, between the dead partner and the living partners, which led to frequent comment and speculation. A remark made by one person to another as the crowd was gathering, and which speedily was repeated throughout the room as a

good thing, fairly illustrated the general feeling :—

‘ Oh, depend on it, Mort’s got somebody, as rich and as foolish as [■]Mrs. Jehoshaphat, to buy ; and we shall see him emerge before long, most likely, as owner of half the estate, with a lien on the remainder.’

But there was yet another attractive feature of the sale,—the possible appearance in the room of Mr. Griffith Williams. Nay, who could tell, people asked, with a smile, but he would be the buyer, out of pure love for Israel, and so shake hands, and be friends once more ?

This was but gossip, but the gossip reached Israel Mort, and affected him more deeply than he would like to have been conscious of.

That was just the one and only thing that he could see in the distance, of the nature of a calamity, likely to enhance his present dangers and troubles.

And Mr. Griffith Williams was the very first person [he set eyes on when he entered the auctioneer’s room, and who saw him enter ; and, Israel

fancied, with a half smile, that was immediately repressed.

The gossips had only done justice to Israel's aims and energy. He had not idled away the interim betwixt the appearance of the advertisement and the day of sale. After many refusals from neighbouring coal-owners whom he knew personally, and after employing numerous agents, whom he stimulated by the promise of a large bonus in the event of success, he found at last a mining agent, who had received a commission from a client, a Mr. Colman, to inquire into the state and property of the mine, with a view to investment.

Could he see Mr. Colman? It was feared not, but he had said he should be at the auction.

Israel knew Mr. Colman to be a man of ample capital and estimable character, and that he was a busy man, far too busy to think of managing Cwm Aber himself.

So he sat down at once where he was, wrote for some hours, and then handed to the agent a paper which he said would tell Mr. Colman all

he wanted to know, and the accuracy of which he guaranteed.

And with that Israel Mort was obliged to be content, hardly knowing whether he was dealing with a friend or foe.

But on the very morning of the sale a note had reached Israel from Mr. Colman authorising him to bid on his, Mr. Colman's responsibility, ten thousand pounds for the two-thirds share held by the heirs, and another ten thousand for the charge on the mine.

He proposed also to be there himself in time to bid, but gave Israel power in case of accidental hindrances.

Thus armed Israel entered the auction room and took up a position where he could be sure to see every glance of the auctioneer, and be able to make him in return see or hear any sign or sound he might make.

The critical question for him was whether or no Mr. Colman would get the mine for ten thousand pounds, a miserable and utterly inadequate price, or whether anybody would drive the price up beyond that sum.

What if by any possibility Griffith Williams had got to know of this arrangement? Would it not stimulate him, if he were at all open to buy, to venture a figure beyond the ten thousand, believing that some one else would also advance on this, and so free him while shutting out Israel and his supporter? Or even if the mine were knocked down to the Squire, he might still be content, knowing as he did it was worth so much more than it was likely to fetch.

But Israel Mort had in any case one great consolation: the higher the sum obtained, the larger would be the estimated value of his third share.

The auctioneer, who was fond of his own eloquence, described in glowing characters the value of the mine, and its almost illimitable capabilities, which he illustrated by figures and statistics that startled Israel, who seemed to recognize in them a sort of reflection of his own statement to Griffith Williams, during their former negotiations.

But he was re-assured, as he remembered that if Griffith Williams had helped the heirs to make the best of the property by furnishing such par-

ticulars it must be quite clear that he could not intend himself to buy.

The auctioneer proposed to begin with sixty thousand pounds, but finding no one tempted to speak, then descended by bold steps of ten thousand each till he had got only one ten thousand left behind to work by.

A voice in a far off corner now called out
‘Five thousand!’

Israel craned his neck round and rose on tip-toes to discover the bidder, and recognized the voice as that of an agent, one employed by him, but who had failed. So Israel had not the least idea what the bid meant, having had no recent communication with him.

Would Mr. Griffith Williams now strike in? Israel could not but look, with that iron face of his, towards his enemy, who stood by the auctioneer, but made no sign.

‘Six thousand!’ said Israel, on the part of Mr. Colman, who had not yet arrived, and for whom he looked with anxiety, not as doubting the authority given to him but that Israel knew enough of human nature to know that if Mr.

Colman were himself bidding, and was forced up to his mark, he would probably, at the last moment, strain a point, and go farther than he had said he would.

‘Seven thousand!’ called out the agent.

‘Eight!’ said Israel, but only after as long a pause as he dared, for he wanted to stretch out the time, and so let Mr. Colman come to rescue him from his unknown foe.

‘Nine thousand!’ promptly replied the agent.

Again delaying as long as possible, but watching the auctioneer’s eye the while, as sharply as if he thought it possible he might be in collusion with those who seemed bent on defeating his plans, and so suddenly let his hammer fall, he called out with as steady a voice as if he were prepared for any number of advances yet, while knowing it was in fact his last bid—

‘Ten thousand!’

He began to breathe again, as he found this time his bid was followed by a deep silence.

In vain the auctioneer recapitulated all the ‘points’ of the bargain offered, and expatiated on the certain wealth it would secure to an enter-

prising speculator; no one advanced, and Israel began to look somewhat sternly at the speaker, as if asking whether he was not exceeding the usual etiquette of the institution by delaying to strike.

Mr. Griffith Williams's voice was now for the first time heard speaking aloud. He remarked in his usual courteous and gentlemanly way, that probably there might be some present who would prefer to bid for the mine and the charge upon it, as one lot. And he should not object to begin with an offer of fifteen thousand pounds.

The auctioneer, after a pause to see if anybody objected, accepted the suggestion; for which, indeed, he did not seem unprepared.

Israel felt the ground gliding from under his feet, but restrained all tokens of emotion as he said simply—

‘Sixteen!’

‘Thank you! Sixteen thousand pounds only are offered, gentlemen. Sixteen thousand only for that which on my conscience I believe is capable of returning at least sixteen thousand a year!’

‘Seventeen!’ said Mr. Griffith Williams, and it was evident his face and voice were influenced by

secret and strong feeling which he could no longer restrain. He and Israel were once more face to face, and dealing with mightier weapons for weal or woe, than horsewhips, or the documents of petty litigation.

Looking in vain for Mr. Colman and trying now different tactics, Israel at once responded boldly—

‘Eighteen!’

‘Nineteen!’ almost shouted Mr. Williams.

The critical moment had now come indeed. Israel’s next must be his last bid, his last chance of influencing the future partnership.

A bold thought occurred to him.

‘Is it understood, Mr. Lewis Williams,’ he asked, ‘that the management of the mine is vested in me?’

‘Oh, Mr. Mort, we can’t go into such matters here! Any advance on nineteen thousand pounds? Going for nineteen!’

‘One moment, sir,’ thundered Israel’s voice through the room, ‘one moment! I have not done bidding. But I wish you to take note that I here publicly avow my right to sole manage-

ment, and that, whoever be the purchaser, I will defend that right to the last !

‘ Any advance ? Going, going—’

‘ Twenty thousand ! ’ cried Israel, and so loud as to make it impossible that there should be any cry of too late !

The auctioneer looked at Mr. Williams, but he shook his head.

Israel’s blow had told.

Then friends began to whisper to the Squire, and there was quite a commotion among the group amid which he stood. The auctioneer, instead of again calling for an advance, and threatening with his hammer to knock the property down to the last bidder, began leisurely to cut open and suck an orange.

Then advancing to him, Mr. Griffith Williams and he whispered together, and continued to do so, till Israel interrupted them :—

‘ Let’s have all fair and above board, Mr. Lewis Williams, or the sale may be vitiated.’

Appearing to treat the remark with unconcern, Mr. Lewis Williams did however at once stop the talk, and resume his hammer.

And then seeing that the commotion had ceased, and that Mr. Griffith Williams had evidently made up his mind one way or the other, the auctioneer, carefully not looking at him, began once more to ask :

‘Any advance on twenty thousand, gentlemen?’

‘Twenty-one,’ said Griffith Williams.

Israel looked despairingly round once more for his backer, Mr. Colman, but looked in vain.

‘Any advance on twenty-one thousand pounds? I shall not dwell!’ And he did not. Barely giving Israel time to bid, if he had intended to do so again, the hammer fell, and the result was announced :—

‘Purchaser—Mr. Griffith Williams.’

CHAPTER XXIV.

TAKING POSSESSION.

ISRAEL was not long left in doubt as to the special thoughts that had moved Griffith Williams in the last moments of the bidding, first to give it up on hearing Israel's statement that he was permanently manager, and then suddenly to return to his first intention, after the brief discussion with his friends.

The very next day that gentleman appeared at the pit mouth, accompanied by the said friends and by his solicitors, no longer the pettifogging Mr. Croft, of whom Griffith had got ashamed, but Messrs. Johnes and Dynevor ; whose presence, when made known to Israel, explained in part the excellent understanding he had seen to exist between the auctioneer acting for the heirs, and his former employer.

Israel was at home at the time, unaware of the honour intended him; and in consequence the solicitors proposed to send down for Rees Thomas the Deputy, and say to him what they had come to say.

But a sharp collier's lad, who had already got a kind of knowledge of the bad feeling between his present employer and his former employer, stepped out of the staring group of black faces relieved by whites of eyes, who looked on with wonder at the gentlemen's doings, and ran as fast as he possibly could to Israel's house, and burst in upon Israel and his wife sitting at an early dinner with the intimation—broken by gasps for breath—

‘Oh sir—please Mr. Mort—there's Mr. Griffith Williams and a lot of other gentlemen at the pit mouth, and I don't know what they ain't a going to do!’

‘Who sent you?’

‘Nobody but myself—please.’

‘Good lad! Put that shilling in your pocket, and we'll have a talk about you and the mine another time. Now can you run back, even faster than you came?’

The lad grinned—and though still panting, said he didn't know he was sure, he had come pretty fastish.

‘Well, quick as you can! Say to Mr. Griffith Williams I am coming, then find Rees Thomas; if he's below, let the cage go down with you, to the stoppage of everything else, and tell him to resist with all the force at his command any attempt to descend.’

‘I will, sir.’

‘Off then! I shall be not many minutes after you.’

The lad, benefited by even so temporary a rest, flew along, revelling in dreams of what this run was to bring him.

Meantime the gentlemen had not been without occupations to amuse them. They had sent for Mr. Rees Thomas; who, after they had waited a long while, replied by the same messenger, he could not possibly attend upon them for an hour or so, and had privately warned their messenger to seek his master instantly.

The gentlemen, however, had not thought proper to wait for his re-ascent. The assembled

party marched in a body into the little counting-house, where it was with difficulty they found convenient standing room ; and Mr. Williams and the solicitors began to rummage the table and drawers and cupboard for books of accounts and papers, while the others looked on approvingly.

Nothing the searchers did find seemed to meet their exact want ; so they put all back, and at last made a dead stand before a locked desk.

‘The books we want are there,’ said Mr. Griffith, pointing at it ; and looking heated while striving to appear calm.

‘Probably ;’ said one of the solicitors, and turned away to whisper to his partner, who was heard to reply to some enquiry or suggestion—

‘Certainly not ! Too dangerous ! Too violent ! Not to be thought of for a moment.’

But Griffith Williams heard and understood, and accepting the fact that one of the two shared his own thought, said,

‘Let it be broken open !’

Messrs. Johnes and Dynevor looked at one another, and respectfully began to explain that—

But their client was no longer accessible to

reason. He had got a notion that if only he took possession of the two books he had learned Israel himself kept, containing, the one, a daily record of all cash payments and all cash receipts, and the other of the Dr. and Cr. accounts of all who dealt with the mine, he would be able to paralyse action on Mort's part, fortify his own claim, by sheer strength of possession, to the entire management; and, as having the worst possible opinion of the man's honesty, perhaps find out something, he hardly knew what, that might enable him to show up his late manager as the vilest of rogues.

Turning suddenly upon the men of law, Griffith said, with concentrated feeling, 'If you won't break it open, I will.'

As they hesitated—for they were alike unwilling to offend against law and decency on the one hand, and against so valuable a client on the other—he caught up a half rusty screw-driver that lay temptingly near; and, in spite of the earnest protestations of his advisers, but stimulated by the partisan spirit of his friends, he in a moment drove in the iron, and forced up the lid; and there were the two books that had been described to him—

one a pocket ledger in green leather, the other a sort of big ciphering book in rough calf.

It was at this moment the messenger returned from the depths below with Rees Thomas's reply, saw what had been done, and saw Griffith Williams pocket the ledger, while he began with eager suspicion to study the bigger cash book, by laying it open on the table.

Getting no reply, the man hastened away to Israel, and almost immediately met the boy running as if for dear life, and who shouted, Mr. Mort was coming directly.

The messenger, however, went on till he met his employer, some half mile further on, and made known the very serious news of what he had seen.

One moment only for thought did Israel give himself, with eyes fixed on the dead fern below his feet, then said,

‘Fetch Crump. He is at home ; I saw him only a little while ago. Tell him I need his aid instantly at the mine. Say, too, I have secured for him that which he wanted. He must bring his staff of office. Stop ; tell every night-shift man you meet on your way, or find lolling about, to

hurry instantly to the mine ; that I want help at once ! ’

Away went the messenger, a man chosen by Rees Thomas for the occasion, and who proved worthy of it. For within ten minutes after Israel himself reached the mine, he saw at least a dozen colliers running towards him ; and beyond them he saw approaching, and already near, the constable Crump.

Before going into the counting-house he was thus able to draw hastily together behind one of the buildings quite a little band of men who he knew would obey him. He bid them remain there till he whistled ; then burst in and sweep everybody out they found inside, using as little violence as possible, but ‘doing the job.’

‘Ay, ay, master ; we understand,’ said one of the foremost.

Thus prepared Israel left them, emerged from the shelter of the building, advanced to the office door, and went in ; the gentlemen who blocked it up giving way, and staring hard at him, as if to ask how he liked the look of the business now.

Griffith Williams was at the moment engaged, as before described, leaning over the cash book and pointing out items to the solicitors, who seemed in sympathy with his suspicions to see something very wrong, and to shake their heads accordingly.

For the first time, perhaps, in his life, Israel Mort did something to earn a character for politeness. He took off his hat when he had fairly got within, bowed and wished good morning all round, singling out and naming any one he knew, and reserving the most delicate bit for the last, that is to say, when addressing the chief actor in the scene.

‘Mr. Griffith Williams, I am pleased to see you here so soon, and I cannot doubt but that it means bygones are to be bygones; that we are, after all, destined it seems by fortune to pull together, and may as well therefore do it amicably.’

Was this irony, or had Israel speculated on the possibility of turning this very dangerous incident to his own advantage, by giving the offender the opportunity to back out of his ugly position, and assume a different one?

It is possible that if Griffith Williams could have given himself time for cool reflection, or if he could have got rid of the witnesses before whom he had so irretrievably committed himself, he might have responded in a spirit that, if not ‘amicable,’ might yet have led to a better understanding.

But his hatred of Israel was already a mania. He had no rest for it. Was it, then, to be conceived that now that he had got power, he should not use it? His reply was—

‘Israel Mort, I bandy no words with you. I will pay you at a valuation the just worth of your share—’

‘Which isn’t in the market,’ interrupted Israel, coolly.

‘On your peaceably giving up possession;’ continued Mr. Williams, ignoring the interruption.

‘Is that all you have to say?’ asked Israel, looking rather wistfully into the very eyes of his foe.

Griffith Williams glared at him, but disdained reply.

Taking hold of a dog-whistle that hung about his neck, a whistle familiar to every man or boy who had business in or about the mine, Israel gave full voice to it.

A sudden pattering of feet was heard a moment after, and all within the room saw outside at least a score of colliers assembled; whose threatening looks, though they were entirely unarmed, warned the gentlemen they were engaged in no child's play.

Before, however, they could obey the orders received, Israel threw up the little window and shouted—

‘Stop, lads; the gentlemen, I think, are going away like gentlemen, who see they are not wanted. So let all pass, if they will, except Mr. Griffith Williams.’

Then turning round, he said to the gentlemen whom he proposed to turn out,

‘I wish to speak to Mr. Griffith Williams a few words in private. I wish him distinctly to understand it is for his own sake, not mine.’

‘To the devil with you!’ replied Griffith; and then, turning to the others, continued, ‘Come, friends, we have done enough for the day.’

‘You go not, Mr. Griffith, till—’

That gentleman’s reply was to bid his friends,
‘Go on out!’

‘Obey orders,’ shouted Israel, ‘All out, but *him!*’

A wild attack and scuffle, blows and vehement cries, and then Mr. Griffith’s friends found themselves with torn clothes and bleeding hands and faces, not only outside, but scattered helplessly abroad, like a flock of sheep without their shepherd, while Mr. Griffith remained a prisoner in the very scene of his recent victory.

Israel had already taken possession of the cash book and hastily looked inside to see if any leaves had been torn out. Satisfied the book remained intact, he now said—

‘The ledger, if you please!’

‘I retain it to prove what a villain you are.’

‘I tried to save your honour and respectability before, by asking you to let me speak to you alone. I still wish to save both, now you are alone. Give me the book.’

‘Not while there’s a drop of blood in my body to resist.’

‘I warn you once more, to avoid exposure. The constable is at hand. If he comes, I charge you with burglary and theft, and I defy him to help from taking the charge.’

‘You—you dare not!’ gasped out Mr. Williams. ‘It is a lie to frighten me; fool that you are as well as rogue!’

‘Tell Crump to come in; you will find him in the engine house by the fire,’ said Israel very quietly to one of his black satellites outside; and who was the man who had seen the Squire take possession of the ledger. ‘Come in with him. You will be wanted as witness.’ Then turning to the Squire, he said,

‘Mr. Griffith Williams, once more, and for the last time will you spare yourself and me the—’

What unutterable thoughts and feelings swept through the breast of the unhappy man may be conceived, as he saw the personage approaching who had been summoned; and felt he was on the verge of he knew not what precipice, as he obeyed once more the instinct of caution that was in him, ever in him, but unfortunately never

coming out of him in time, as he without a word more put down the book.'

'Thanks. And now, Mr. Williams, if you will from this moment let the subject rest, it shall never again be mentioned by me in any way. Explain to your friends as you please what has happened. I will say nothing—if not compelled to speak in defence of my character.'

The gentleman addressed picked up and put on his hat, which had fallen in the struggle, then said with lips that visibly trembled, while the frame drawn up to its fullest height seemed to assert its dignity—

'I thank you, in the *same spirit*. And since you so covet the management, take it, in return for this—this *favour* you have just done me. But I wash my hands of the matter altogether. If there are profits, I shall take my share.'

'Which I will gladly see is your full share;' interposed Israel, hardly yet understanding the exact tendency of what was said to him.

'If there are losses, those you will have to deal with as you best may, for I should allow everything to be seized before I would advance a

shilling. I say this merely to meet your *friendly* advance with the like.'

'And as to the capital required?'

'I leave all that to you.'

'You mean you will advance what is actually needed?'

'Not a shilling. Good morning, Mr. Mort.'

He bowed ; and Israel certainly did not bow in return. All his politeness had gone out of him.

CHAPTER XXV.

REVELLING IN LAW.

ISRAEL'S prospects were now dark indeed. He saw as plainly as his enemy could have explained to him the whole force of the position. He must sell his share for whatever it would fetch, if indeed any one with capital and character would buy under such circumstances; or he must move on, without aid, year after year, if that were possible, knowing that if he failed it was utter ruin; and that if he succeeded, even to the extent of being able to continue alone the costly work of reparation, there was another waiting to take the lion's share of the fruits.

But could he hope under any circumstances to make the mine so profitable as to accumulate capital for so large an undertaking?

That was the problem he revolved day by day,

now in his thoughts, now in elaborate calculations on paper, till at last he came to the conclusion it was impossible. And for this reason: he could not employ in the present dangerous state of the mine enough hands to make any noticeable difference in the amount of coal produced. Rees Thomas had already accomplished for him all that was possible in that way.

So far from his seeing any prospect of proceeding with his own bold and able scheme for the regeneration of the works, he saw, on the contrary, that to keep up even the present weekly product of coal would require unceasing expenditure on 'dead work,' so bad was the state in which it had been left by Jehoshaphat.

He had, then, simply to make up his mind to fight on for that which in the end would most likely never be obtained; and to do so before the eyes, and in the very teeth, as it were, of a rich and influential partner, bent on his ruin, and prepared to take instant advantage of the slightest opening.

With unabated courage and fortitude he accepted the position, and sternly set himself to

confront the difficulties, whatever they might be. His behaviour, could it have been watched by a dispassionate and appreciative observer, would have suggested much matter for speculation as to what such a man might have been capable of under happier circumstances.

The patient, sleepless care with which he followed the ever-lurking enemy—the gas—tracking it, as a Red Indian tracks his foe, from lair to lair, and compelling flight if he could do no more ; the sagacity which determined how to do just that exact amount of ‘dead work’ to prevent further ‘Falls’ and injuries, and at the exact time when most needed, that would prevent calamity, and yet not exceed by a hair’s breadth the absolute necessity of the case—all this was simply wonderful in a man bowed down with ceaseless pecuniary difficulty ; and who began to feel, almost for the first time, something of an aching about the heart whenever the subject of his domestic relations rose to disturb the ordinary current of thought.

But he worked on so gallantly, bore all so ungrudgingly, seemed so stable and unfaltering in his every word and act, that even his very nume-

rous enemies began to feel a certain respect for him, though Mr. Griffith Williams was not one of the number. On the contrary, as his own personal friends cooled in their hostility to Israel, his hatred proportionately warmed to red—nay, to white-heat—fed as it was, like a fire, with fresh fuel of the most exciting kind, by seeing that as his enemy rose in public opinion, he sank.

To this cause, perhaps, may be attributed much of the litigation that very soon began again with increased fury.

First he strove for an injunction to stop Israel's proceeding with the execution of a contract he had entered into to supply the gas works with coal, his plea being that the tender had been sent in without his, Griffith Williams', authority. Had he succeeded, there would of course have been an end of Israel's management ; but when the judge had read a paper exhibited on behalf of Israel, signed by the late Mrs. Jehoshaphat, the case was stopped, and the plaintiff left with the costs.

Then he made a legal demand, with all legal formalities, for power to examine the accounts ; and it was decided that Israel had shown no un-

willingness to exhibit them at a proper time ; and again he had to bear all the expenses.

He tried to send a mining agent down to examine the mine, but not having asked permission, the agent was refused ; and so nothing came of that move for the time being.

But when Mr. Griffith Williams went straightforwardly to work, and avowed through his lawyers his object, namely, to show that Israel was mining beyond the legitimate boundary, and actually trespassing on his, the Squire's, private estate which adjoined, Israel politely undertook not only to admit the agent, but Mr. Williams too, if he pleased to come, and offered himself to conduct them to the spot, and give every additional aid they might require to test scientifically the question. And so he came triumphant out of that, which did a little alarm him, for he was by no means sure a slight mistake of a few feet had not been made by one of his deputy officers, in securing a passage-way round an intervening and useless piece of rock.

It would be at once ludicrous and wearisome to narrate all the petty acts into which the Squire's

maniacal hatred urged him to engage, in the hope of breaking down through them the resistance to his will, that could be conquered by no other means.

Israel had taken on rent a large piece of mountain land, that at one point, descending, touched the Squire's kitchen garden ; and which happened at the time to be the only ground obtainable where two or three horses might be turned out on occasion. One day the garden gate was open, two of Israel's horses got in, amused themselves by eating as much as they could, and by trampling down pretty well everything else. Israel's men said the gate had been left open by the Squire's servants ; the Squire brought witnesses to swear positively it had been carefully fastened at night-fall, and suggested bad feeling on the part of Israel's people as at the bottom of the affair. Israel was cast, and had to pay heavily for the damage and costs ; at a time, too, when every sovereign taken from him for such purposes was like wringing out drops of his blood by a thumb-screw.

This was followed up in time by the ' right of

way' case, as it was popularly called. Israel and certain of his colliers were accustomed to pass through a field belonging to the Squire, by a path that from time immemorial had been used as a public way. Now it so happened that the Squire had done, or thought he had done, acts calculated to show it was a public path only by sufferance; but as he had not acted on his notices, nobody stirred, or paid any attention to the matter, beyond an occasional laugh now and then, as Israel and his men were seen trudging along the path as usual.

Suddenly the Squire, having satisfied himself the path was rarely used by anybody but the colliery people, shut it up by a gate.

Next day the gate was lying on the ground, and Israel and his colliers striding over it.

Then a much more formidable affair was erected, with sharp spikes along the top; and as if that spectacle was not sufficiently threatening, a large board with an inscription in Welsh and English appeared above the barrier, announcing that 'trespassers would be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law.'

About midnight of that same day that witnessed what was supposed to be the completion of the arrangement, Griffith Williams happened to look out of his bedroom window, while wondering how Israel would act on the morrow, and saw a great bonfire blazing away in a certain direction.

He dressed himself instantly, got his horse forth, and rode to the spot, where he found his anticipations verified: the heavy gate was enveloped with the flame from a great mass of brushwood, and he was just in time to see it fall in blazing ruin to the ground.

Another law-suit, and another defeat for Mr. Williams, and very heavy costs, on account of the great number of witnesses called on both sides. The right of way was established, and from that moment Israel became popular, and was regarded as a sort of tribune of the people.

How much longer this state of things would have gone on, if unchecked by some new influence, no man would have ventured to predict; but, happily, the check came now. In severe words the judge commented on the litigating spirit shown by the facts that indirectly came out on

this trial regarding the past relations of Israel and his rich partner; and though he did not directly fix on one or the other of the litigants the odium of the persecution suggested, popular opinion did, and so effectually, that the Squire was at last constrained to stop.

These proceedings of course extended through some years:—During all this time the mine was growing ever worse, till it became a byword among the colliers of other mines, when they heard of a new man going to Cwm Aber to replace some one who had gone away,

‘ Ah, well! if a man’s hard up for a job at other places, he can always get a berth at the “ Valley o’ the Shadow!” meaning Israel’s mine, and likening it to John Bunyan’s Valley of the Shadow of Death, the ‘ Pilgrim’s Progress ’ being one of the few works of fiction a Welshman will read.

CHAPTER XXVI.

PINNED TO THE PILLOW.

IF a good man bearing himself nobly under calamity is a sight for the gods, what is it when a man not good on the whole does the same, with the additional burden that his moral deficiencies impose?

Leaving casuists to answer the question, it may be safely said that it was impossible for any one to restrain sympathy for Israel Mort, who, knowing all the circumstances already narrated, then heard further that Israel's wife had become gradually afflicted with some secret and inscrutable malady, which neither Dr. Jolliffe nor any of the more skilful practitioners of the county town could beneficially affect; and that the only hope of saving her was in a journey to London to see a very eminent member of the profession who had made his fame by dealing with kindred diseases.

Had Mrs. Mort possessed any one dear friend in the world who could have asked her in confidence the true state of the case, she would probably have burst into tears, and said simply :

‘ My heart is breaking, and they don’t understand that ! ’

But going further in confession she would, perhaps, have confided a secret to her friend that she really desired to go to London, and was glad of an excuse. The reader will guess why—to see David.

Five years have elapsed since his departure. She has heard but seldom from him. Boys away from home, in new scenes, among new acquaintances, rarely write much to those left behind. The time, too, was before postage had become cheap. Every letter cost David an amount he was often unable and sometimes unwilling to find, as depriving him of the means of relaxation from the hardships of his life.

He gave her very little knowledge of what these hardships were, very little aid of any kind by which to understand his true position, and he never

once asked if his father wanted him to return, or even touched on the subject.

But his letters when they did come were still things to be wept over, to be read again and again and again, and never without some comfort. For the key-note struck by David at his departure, of hope in the future, was still sounded in these affectionate, simple, but ever earnest pages ; where the poor mother could always see in some part having reference to herself the traces of the tears that had fallen, and dimmed the words.

And it was he who, when she at last reluctantly told him of her state, which probably she would not have done, but for the vague hope that he might change his purposes and come back, or at least venture down on a visit to her—it was he who immediately drew from her sufficient knowledge concerning her ailment to be able to make inquiries as to the best adviser in London ; and so, while mentioning his name and qualifications to his mother, was led to form the wish, and urge it upon her with a passionate eloquence that no mother's heart could resist, that she would at once come up, and thus that they might meet !

The poor woman could read no farther that day.

She could only press her hand upon her heart, and go to her bed-side, and ask on her knees if indeed she might but see David her son once more, and then die.

Taking up the letter again next day, she found that David was prepared for the possibility of his father accompanying her; and if that were so, he would, if she wished, meet and take from him submissively such reception as he chose to give. She might rely on that.

But he could not conceal from her that it had been, and still was, his dearest hope to put off that meeting till he could stand in his father's presence better prepared; till, indeed, while asking forgiveness for his flight, he should be able to say without shame, 'Father, thus have I done!'

He then proceeded to show her how his father or Dr. Jolliffe might easily find some kind lady to take charge of her on the journey; and how it might be shown to the former that, through a distant acquaintance of her own in London (well

known to Israel), she might be met, and taken to a lodging already provided for her, and be thoroughly well cared for during her stay; the fact being, as David took care she should well understand, he himself would attend to everything, and remain with her the whole time.

Fearing to let Israel get the least suspicion of the true originator of this idea of the journey to London, she ventured one day to ask Dr. Jolliffe if he knew such a person, mentioning the name of the physician sent to her by David.

‘One of our most eminent men,’ was the doctor’s prompt answer. ‘By-the-bye, Mrs. Mort, he is the very man I should have sent you to, had I supposed there was the least hope of your undertaking such a journey.’

‘Do you think I might venture it?’ said Mrs. Mort, in reply, and to the doctor’s great astonishment; who knew not how his patient’s usual timidity and desire to be let alone had for the moment been overborne by a stronger influence.

‘Certainly I do, if only you take to it kindly yourself. All will depend on that. But how about Mr. Mort?’

‘I—I think—he would not object, if he were convinced it were reasonable.’

‘Indeed ! Glad to hear that. If that’s all, I will see him immediately.’

But Dr. Jolliffe in his own secret heart did not for a moment believe that Israel would consent. He might spare his wife, but not the money.

To his surprise he found Israel just reversed the prediction. He was more anxious about his wife than Dr. Jolliffe had thought it in his nature to be. And as to the expense, he did not even mention it.

‘Unluckily,’ said Israel, ‘I cannot go away from the mine long enough to be with her all through.’ He sighed deeply as he said this, and seemed again as if re-considering the matter. ‘No, it is impossible ! if anything were to happen in my absence — No, doctor,’ he said abruptly, ‘that is not to be done. But if you can see your way to arrange with my wife, satisfactorily to her and to you, the money shall be forthcoming, and I shall be grateful to have it all taken off my hands.’

The doctor took him at his word, and so it was settled between them.

But after reporting his success to Mrs. Mort, and agitating her by the prospect of so soon embracing her dear boy, he seemed to forget all about the matter, or at least be very dilatory in accomplishing it. One day he spoke of the weather as unfit, and she must wait to see that settle. Another time he said he had not been fortunate enough to find any lady he knew going yet to London, but no doubt he should soon ; and so on. Poor Mrs. Mort began at last to fear she knew not what, about her husband, or her boy.

But after many days had thus passed away, he came bustling in late one night, when Israel was already in bed, to say that he had found a friend at last, who with her daughter was going to London, and that he had himself booked inside places at the coach office for the morrow ; that Israel was to leave all to him. He would fetch her in his own carriage and see her safe into the coach.

A strangely sad, yet at times happy, and altogether sleepless night followed for her. She had hardly ever travelled even in her young and vigorous days. Could she do so now with safety ?

When she left that roof, should she ever see it again? Should she in the early morning, when Israel would go as usual to the mine, take her last kiss from him, now that he seemed growing kinder to her, notwithstanding all his heavy trials?

Israel was waked by her sobbing, and then told of the journey to-morrow.

He said little, but somehow either in the few words or in the tones there was comfort; and at last under the operation of that anodyne she slept. When she woke in the morning he was gone.

But she found on the pillow a bank-note for twenty pounds, with a few words scrawled on a bit of paper, and fastened to the note by a pin.

‘Dear wife,’ it said, ‘I don’t like to disturb you; sleep will do you good. Here’s twenty pounds; if you want more, let me know, and it shall reach you by next post. Come back soon, or I shall miss you; if you can also come back better in health and spirits, it shall go hard but I will try to prevent any relapse.

‘Somehow, wife, adversity teaches better than prosperity, though all the same I’d be glad of a change now. God bless you,

‘ISRAEL MORT.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOTHER AND SON.

PUNCTUAL to the very minute he had fixed, the doctor came and took off his patient towards Leath.

Mrs. Mort was too full of all she had left behind her to talk much for the first few minutes; and every effort the doctor made to rally her, to interest her, to win a smile from her, seemed only to call forth fresh fits of weeping.

So he let her grief exhaust itself, and then again tried, and with better success. She began to remark upon objects they passed, and at last ventured to ask a question about the ladies she was to accompany.

‘Well,’ he said, laughing, ‘I have been wondering how long you would be before you asked me that. I had supposed it was not in woman’s

nature to have repressed curiosity so long, about her intended companions for so many hours, shut up inside a coach; where, by-the-bye, you will be all alone. You three will have it all to yourselves the whole way to London.'

'How can that be?' asked Mrs. Mort.

'Because they have taken the fourth place, to be, as the young lady phrases it, all the more cosy.'

'Rich people, I suppose?' said Mrs. Mort, with a sigh, and a shrinking look on her face, as if she felt they and herself would be hardly suitable companions.

'Yes, but very nice people, and I have no doubt you will get on very well together. Oh, here we are!'

They drove up to the hotel from which the coach was to start, and upon which they were already packing great quantities of luggage.

'Dear me,' exclaimed the doctor, 'it's later than I thought; our friends are already in their places. I will see your luggage safe. Come, let me introduce you to them.'

Mrs. Mort went very nervously towards the coach door, which was opened by the guard, and

there, true enough, sat two ladies, the younger of whom, a bright-looking, lovely girl of thirteen, seeing the astonishment depicted in Mrs. Mort's features, clapped her hands, and said—

‘Oh, that sly doctor, mamma! he has been as good as his word, and inveigled her here under false pretences.’

The elder lady's comment was to put out her rosy, well-nourished hand, and grasp warmly the attenuated fingers of the invalid, as she said—

‘Dear Mrs. Mort, I am so glad! Come in. Thank God, we have got together at last, and can talk away to our hearts' content without the worry of the men.’

Mrs. Mort looked from the matronly to the maidenly face—the last more like to her a bit of delicious sunshine than anything mortal or human, so bright was it, so sparkling, so altogether sweet, and her heart brimmed over as she dropped into her seat, unable for some time to reply by a single word.

By this time Dr. Jolliffe was back again, and getting into the vacant place said—

‘Now, Mrs. Mort, you are not going to be angry,

are you, with me, for my little surprise? It will do you good. But I must explain how it all happened. When I first knew of your proposed journey, I was aware that Mrs. Griffith Williams had long been talking of a visit to London; and so I have been manœuvring ever since to make you go together, and try together to accomplish a great and admirable work—the reconciliation of your husbands. But don't expose me, pray, to either, or you'll never have my aid again. Hark, there's the horn! Good-bye!' And with a cordial grasp all round, he disappeared, and the coach drove off.

Never surely was invalid so guarded and cared for as was Mrs. Mort now by her two friends. Nest sat opposite her, and seemed to do nothing but study her face, as if to discover what it was likely to want or think next. As to Mrs. Griffith Williams, she made the invalid lean against her, took her poor thin cold fingers into her own, and warmed them tenderly, and continued to retain them afterwards.

Is it to be wondered at, then, if before an hour or two had passed away, all the hidden troubles

in the hearts of the two women had been brought forth, in sympathetic exchange, and each left the better for the process?

Or that even the one little secret which at first the poor mother thought it best, even for David's sake, to conceal, that she was going to meet him, came out at last; and was welcomed by Mrs. Griffith Williams with significant gladness, and by Nest's falling into a brown study, which never quite left her all the way to London.

Would they know him? How would he be dressed? Was he tall, thin, or stout? Would he know them?

Mrs. Mort said simply she was sure she and he would know each other, and she thought he would know Mrs. Griffith, but was quite sure he would never recognize in the richly dressed young lady opposite (who was indeed in appearance already verging on womanhood in spite of her tender years), the little girl who had played with him in the wood of Brynnant.

Nest did not seem to like this idea, and was very sure she would know him.

The pleasurable excitement of these revelations,

and of the interchange of friendly feeling, was followed by the usual reaction; and it became necessary to stop for the night.

Mrs. Mort would have had them go on without her, but was made to feel herself so ashamed of the proposition, as to venture no more proposals of the kind.

In the morning she was better. And the remainder of the journey was pursued almost in silence, each one getting occupied with her own thoughts.

They were already passing through the crowded streets of London, and had nearly reached the inn where the coach stopped, when Nest suddenly exclaimed—

‘There he is! Look! Do look, Mrs. Mort. In the blue coat! See how anxiously he is watching the coach in advance of us. It must be he!’

Mrs. Mort tried to look, but there was a watery film over her eyes that blinded them. She was willing to believe it was he, and could wait patiently, blessing God the while that the time had come she had so long prayed for.

The inn yard was reached, and there at the

very corner, and on the edge of the kerb stone, stood a manly-looking youth of seventeen or eighteen, with a nervous sensitive face, and wonderfully bright eyes, that were fixed anxiously on the window of the coach, as it passed round the corner.

‘Mother!’ rang out a clear voice, and a hand was laid on the edge of the window, while its owner ran along by the side, though there was scarcely room for him to do so without danger.

‘Take care, Oh my dear boy!’ responded Mrs. Mort, rising for a moment to touch his hand, but obliged to fall back for weakness.

‘All right, mother, don’t fear!’

The moment the coach stopped he opened the door, and taking no notice of any one but his mother, he lifted her slight figure in his arms, and carried her away without a word to a hackney coach in waiting, and deposited her inside; and was then locked in her arms, and so long, that it seemed she knew not how again to let him go. But at last she remembered her friends.

‘Oh, Mrs. Williams, and Nest!’ she said, as if grieved at her own forgetfulness.

‘ You don’t mean, mother—— ’

‘ Yes, dear, and they have taken such care of me. Go to them ; I can wait now ; go, David, but don’t be long. Stop ! ’ He did stop, feeling how deep, how passionate was the cry that came out of his mother’s soul in that one word. So there was another prolonged embrace, and then he was allowed to go.

How he excused himself to the ladies he never told his mother, but when he came back his face was crimsoned, and his eyes glowing with excitement, as he explained how kindly he had been received, and how astonished he was at the change in Nest ; that, indeed, he had not been able to recognise her till she laughed, and said one of her old saucy things to him.

He had given them his mother’s address, and they were to call each day to see her, and they insisted on taking her back with them to Wales.

Happy hours, happy days, were those that succeeded, for both mother and son ; for though she had to tell him of his father’s troubles, and of the ever increasing danger of some calamity in connection with the mine, and although he had

to tell her of the bitternesses of life to a friendless boy set down in the vast wilderness of London—these were matters already anticipated and known something about ; whereas, the fact of their being again together, the overflowing love that seemed to each a new life, a kind of heaven on earth suddenly revealed to two hearts that were in the sorest need of such consolation—these were the influences predominant now, and that for the time overmastered all else.

The physician was seen, and the case very thoughtfully gone into. And the decision given after a second visit was, that she had better return home as soon as her friends were ready, and that she should take with her suggestions for the use of Dr. Jolliffe, that he thought might fairly be expected to do her good and protract her life, probably for some years, though cure itself was not to be expected.

And with such cold comfort as this gave, mother and son were obliged to be content.

The two families met daily, and Nest and David were thus once again thrown into each other's society. But it was curious that while David,

who at first in the frank innocence of his heart could not help letting it be seen that he had practically forgotten Nest altogether, began now only too keenly to remember her, and to find himself miserable whenever Nest was away ; Nest, on the contrary, who had shown her delight in being the first to see and to point him out, gradually relapsed into silence, or worse, to monosyllables.

Then he felt he could speak no more. All the realities of his position, as a clerk at eighteen shillings a week, pressed in upon him with overwhelming force, and made him at last ready to welcome the hour of the departure.

And when that time came and his mother wept on his neck, she whispered to him, ‘David, darling, when I am gone, there is, I hope, another mother for you. I must not say more ; all the rest is with you and with God. Bless you, my boy ; keep good and true, and do not fear work, and if—if—we do never meet again in this world——’

‘Oh, we shall, mother ; we shall !’ said David, kissing away the tears that were rolling down the pale wasted cheeks. ‘For my sake it must be so.

Wait, dearest mother, wait to see what I will make of myself; how I will come back to you in yet another half-dozen years, a man, and with a man's record of genuine work done! Oh, mother, are you not the very dearest thing on earth to me? Then God bless you, and keep you safe for that day!

And so they parted. David shook hands with Mrs. Griffith Williams, but was so nervous about what else remained to do, that he started like a guilty thing when that lady said with a smile—

‘Come, David, shake hands with Nest, who has been crying her eyes out all night.’

‘Oh, mother!’ exclaimed Nest’s deprecatory voice, while she looked even more guilty than David.

The hands were, however, locked in each other just for one single moment; but that moment was long enough for David and Nest to see in each other’s eyes a something that for days, months, years afterwards, would not be forgotten by either.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE LAST CALL.

THE return journey was managed without breaking it for a night's rest; and warm were the congratulations that welcomed Mrs. Mort when met by the doctor; who, as well as Israel, had received notice of the time of her coming. After a most touching and grateful good bye to her friends, he took her home.

As he set her down in her own house once more, and left her after a little genial chat, and the expression of a still more decided hope of recovery than the London physician had given, she gazed around her as if all that had intervened since she last sat there was a dream.

‘When would Mr. Mort be home?’ she asked the servant; who could tell her nothing, but that she expected he would be late, as he was so very busy.

She had tea prepared, but found all appetite had passed away.

She must go upstairs to her bed-room. She went there with the girl's aid, and began to open drawers, and sort things, and arrange them in her own fashion where she found any change.

There seemed a kind of mania upon her for looking after things she had not seen for many years, and for pausing over them, sometimes putting them to her lips before she put them down.

Thus she came upon certain relics of childhood, not David's only, but of the two little ones resting in the churchyard by the wild stream. And she examined them with a strange feeling that somehow they looked altered, and that she was worried about their identity.

Then suddenly sitting down, she began to wring her hands, and cry aloud—

‘Israel, my husband, come!’

The cry was answered from below—

‘Mary!’

She heard the heavy step, she rose to meet it, she advanced, but tottered, and was falling, when

Israel's arm caught and encircled her, and feeling her grow more and more heavy, carried her to the bed, and lifted her on to it, and then kissed her.

‘What, wife, overcome by the journey! Don't mind! That'll soon pass away. Come, tell me all about it; but I see you are not strong enough to-night. To-morrow then. I am in no mood to eat, so I shall come to bed.’

The faintest possible sound came to his ear of—
‘Israel!’

He had moved away, but warned by that sound he turned, and strode to the bed-side, and took one hand in his, while the other slid under her back, and enfolded her waist.

‘Israel!’ then for some seconds she could say no more, for the under-current of restrained anguish at what she was going to say. ‘I—I have seen David—forgive him—and me—for—I—am dying—dear—dear husband.’

‘No, no, no! a thousand times no! I do forgive him and you. Wife, wife! this is an ill time for me. I can no longer spare you; believe me, I cannot. See, drink this, the cordial!’

With shut eyes, she blindly pushed away the proffered glass, then murmured—

‘ Oh, I have so much to say, and—and—Israel—light the candle, it is so dark ! Where are you ? ’ The moment she felt his hand, she kissed it passionately, lifted her face heavenward, and seemed silently to struggle with herself.

‘ Oh God, bless him, and make smooth his path ! Oh, dear God, oh, Christ, bless my husband and my——’

Israel heard no more ; he covered his eyes, as if ashamed of that which they were revealing. When he uncovered them it was to see his wife’s dead features, smiling on him in death.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

ISRAEL MORT, OVERMAN

A STORY OF THE MINE

BY

JOHN SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF 'ABEL DRAKE'S WIFE' 'HIRELL' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

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ISRAEL MORT.



CHAPTER I.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

ONE dull, misty evening of September, some twelve years later than the period referred to in the beginning of this tale, a young man alighted on the platform of the nearest station to Brynnant; and although to the porters and other people about he was a stranger where few strangers came, he asked no questions, even while he peered inquisitively into every face he passed, but went away with his travelling bag, as if every inch of the neighbourhood was familiar to him.

Not the less, however, did he pause, when he had got out of sight of the station, to enter a field

and ascend a little hillock, and stand there for nearly a couple of minutes ; gazing first in one direction, then in another, as if struggling with a double current of thought and emotion, one showing him things and places he had forgotten or never known ; the other recognising by sudden gleams objects unseen since childhood, but treasured ever since as precious links, binding past and future together, and which time had partially disguised ; so that for a brief space there was doubt, then glad and heartfelt recognition.

Every object, however mean or insignificant to others, seemed full of interest for him. At that dingy cottage, with the thatched roof looking in its sodden blackness as if the fingers that put it together must have done their last stroke of work centuries ago, he had once drunk a draught of milk under circumstances that made it seem ever after to him the climax of a boy's felicity in the quenching of thirst.

So with the lake of water he can just see gleaming a couple of fields off. That was where he fished for the first time in his life ; and, even

as he looks, all the boy's delight in his first success returns to him, for he sees another boy there now ; he sees the curve of his rod, the dangling quiver of something dark below—he, too, has just caught a fish, perhaps his first.

He comes to an apple-tree, and remembers both the delicious apples he got from it, and the cruel beating he received from its owner. Then, for the first time, he feels he forgives him.

He soon reaches the town, with its narrow, dark, and dirty streets ; unlighted, except from the shop-windows, which do not themselves appear sufficiently brilliant to have any illumination to spare. But the dirt and darkness are for the moment almost pleasant to him as evidences of the true place—the home—and incline him to forget newer tastes and acquired sanitary knowledge.

He breathes even the misty, grimy atmosphere with a certain air of satisfaction—though not altogether unconscious of the ugly hue it casts over everything around ; for is there not an air of indescribable joyousness in the stream of human life, that seems to bubble and dance through the place ?

A group of young men are singing finely the ‘March of the Men of Harlech ;’ the individuals who pass by hum to themselves some independent snatch of song ; jest and laughter fill up the pauses between all other sounds ; and through the very centre of the moving, vivacious, but not too crowded mass, come wandering along two young girls, in the very flower of maiden prettiness, which not even their dingy dresses can hide ; heeding no one, heeded by none ; their arms so gracefully entwined round each other’s slender form, their faces so full of simple affectionateness, faith, content, and utter abandonment to the spirit of this evening hour, that the stranger, who stands aside to watch them as they pass, is irresistibly reminded of Shakspeare’s charming picture of the two that

grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition ;
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem ;
So with two seeming bodies, but one heart.

‘ Can this be a colliery population ?—why it is an actual idyl of the mine !’ So thought the stranger ; as, with a sigh of reaction from the

delight he had felt in it all, he went on to the inn where he had settled to stay for the night.

Here his strikingly handsome face, his rich brown beard and moustaches—that gave him an air of maturity that was hardly in accord with his actual youth—his gentlemanly yet unassuming gait, and his whole appearance, at once winning and manly, caused him to be the subject of much gossip. Who could he be? What must be his business here? Such were the questions the stranger saw on every face, and at last overheard.

As if to satisfy and to silence these inquisitive folks, he took the first opportunity to let it be known that he had come down as the representative of a well-known London Mine Agency, on business connected with the collieries of the neighbourhood.

He retired to his bedroom very early; but again set the tongues of the people who were carousing below him eagerly to work, by walking to and fro while they drank and smoked, and chatted and sang, but still listened between-whiles, as if fascinated, to the continuing creak of

the floor above them, and the vibration that the stranger's walk caused through the ill-built house ; and which was still continuing when the last lingerer quitted the inn, just after midnight.

The stranger was up early, and stood entranced with delight the moment he got outside the town. Already his first impressions had begun to be subjected to analysis, and to suffer in consequence. Could this be the neighbourhood he had, ever since he left it, thought so beautiful ? Such had been the burden of his later song, as he fell off to sleep.

But now he understood it all. Last night the mountains were invisible, non-existent. Now they were circling everything within the wide scope of his eye—everywhere green, fresh, beautiful, glorious : covered to the very top with fern. Last night he could hear, but not see, the stream running below the grey stone bridge ; now it was a delight to look upon it, to gaze into its pure, translucent depths, as it rushed along singing, as of old, the song the hearer remembered so well, and so deeply loved.

As he went on—passing the mouths of one

lovely valley after another, descending from the mountain heights—as he saw the marsh, the sea, and its shipping with glistening sails—the intervening sand-banks—and the little nook where tall reeds had grown so luxuriantly, as to present all the appearance of a magnificent crop of wheat, ripe for the harvest sickle, he no longer wondered that the black trail of coal slime that covered alike town, streets, and country roads, could not spoil the life of the people. He saw that the hearts of those who sang last night were moved by a true and profound instinct and wisdom—the dirt, dinginess, squalor, were for the moment nothing to them; they, and the true world outside, were alike young and bright, and full of promise, and to be enjoyed accordingly.

But as he returned to the inn, and breakfasted, and the hours passed away, while he waited for the precise one hour about which he so frequently consulted his watch, he seemed to cease to think of the externals of his position, and to grow more serious, almost sad, as he grew more thoughtful.

Precisely at noon he went forth, and his face

grew sadder at each step which conducted him towards the place of his destination—the church and churchyard of Brynnant.

He stopped on his way to note a little waterfall, at the gorge of a narrow pass, the solemn, monotonous voice of which had for some time been ringing in his ears as he approached it. It was crossed by a rail that had dropped at one end on the ground. What a rush of recollections came back as he saw that rail! It was he, probably, who had sat there last—gazing on precisely the same rich undergrowth that filled the pass now; on the same white, bare, naked oaks, stretching their arms at intervals over the dense, tangled, winding way, winding till the eye could follow no farther. It was while sitting on that rail he had finally resolved to quit home, and it was the very vivacity of his movement—one, however, that had more in it of fear than hope, of despair than courage—that caused the end of the rail to fall with him, and suggest to his excited fancy the similar downfall of the scheme he was then nourishing.

He went on. He reached the churchyard.

Slowly he moved among the grave-stones,

striding with almost nervous anxiety over every raised spot of earth that might have been a grave, and at last, under the spreading shade of an ancient yew tree, found the object he sought.

David Mort stood before the grave of his mother.

CHAPTER II.

RETROSPECTION.

WHAT a sorrowful medley, what an inexplicable chaos, did the events of his mother's life, of his father's life, and of his own seem to David, as he stood by the grave, and reviewed them! Her tender love for him, and Israel's hardness towards them both; his father's attempt to make him work in the mine, and her help towards his escape; the grinding poverty, followed, too late for her, by material well-being; her fatal disease, and the visit she made to the metropolis, at Israel's desire, to consult the best London physicians—all that happened at that eventful visit when the wives of the two deadly enemies had met in tears, but also in hope to console each other; and when, by their loving connivance, he (David) had met Nest; and felt, in shame, how

weak had been all his boyish dreams, while he moved in the new light and wondrous glory of the dreams of his manhood, which her exquisitely girlish loveliness created ;—ah, as he thought of all these things here by the grave, how could he help the swelling bitterness at his heart, as he was obliged also to remember his mother had died without one gleam of promise that the hatreds would die out ; and that her one hope would be realised—that he and Nest would yet, by their union, reconcile all !

But there were thoughts of even a deeper, more intensely personal character than these, called forth by the sight of that dumb witness before him—that green, mummy-shaped memorial—which recalled so painfully, even while so grotesquely, the dear form of the lost one.

Her last words at parting with him had been to conjure him to renounce the half-purpose of which he had spoken to her ;—she had prayed him to shun mines and mining, as he would famine, pestilence, and sudden death.

And yet he had finally sought the very things she had warned him against. Why ?

He asked himself that question now, as he sat down by his mother's grave—asked himself with new wonder, and doubt.

What!—a lad of sensitive, kindly, studious, and half-poetic nature—such as he had gradually come to suppose he had been—*he* spend his life like a mole, grubbing in the earth, without even the mole's wholesome, cleanly soil to work in, but instead the greasy, black slime of the coal pit—he, with his actual experiences of his own disgust on the one hand, and of his cowardice on the other—he, of all men in the world, to go, in spite of nature and circumstance, to that very occupation, in the spirit of a man who sees and accepts the truth that it must henceforth be his only one, and be embraced, therefore, with something of the warmth and devotion of a bride!

David could not but laugh aloud and bitterly as he sat there in the solitary churchyard, and mused over these things.

But again he asked himself, in no mocking, but rather in an earnest passionateness of spirit, as if pleading with his better nature—with his deeper instincts, to answer him truly a question now

more than ever momentous—why he had chosen a vocation so likely to be harassing to any man, so peculiarly dangerous to him.

Was it that no other really promised so well for his individual interests, or for the restoration of his father's respect, or for the attainment of his long-cherished desire, that of rendering to his father substantial help?

Mingling with this was there not also an instinctive and manly yearning to try a fall with his deadliest enemy, Fear, under circumstances that would make success absolute?

Or was the motive after all manly shame to appear before the woman he loved, and confess he was a coward in things which other men did without thinking of them?—to let Nest compare him with the men around her, whom she saw playing the part of silent, unconscious heroes, without hope of reward, whether of the world's good opinion, or of its special material benefits?

He knew there was a something in his heart and mind, which he could only occasionally see, and then but doubtfully, that suggested his defect might not be cowardice at all; but the natural

shrinkings of a sensitive temperament from things unlovely, rude, harsh, unpleasant, and which enhanced his insight into all accompanying dangers, while greatly exaggerating them ; temperament which discipline might control, and—happily—at last conquer ?

In trying to answer these wide-sweeping questions, he once more reviewed his own history, trying to draw from it nourishment for his soul, in the undertaking upon which he had entered.

Nurtured under a continual fear of the mine he had as a boy undoubtedly grown to be a coward.

The anguish of the discovery that he was so ; the first feeling of hopelessness when he tried to throw it off, and had to begin under the stern eye and unconcealed contempt of his father ; the alternations of success and failure, in boyhood, in youth, and as a man ; the fear that ever haunted him of a final and fatal collapse if he should chance to be exposed to some great trial ;—these were the secret influences that had been at work for many years on David's character, modifying in all sorts of ways the otherwise healthy discipline of his active life after quitting home.

Then came Nest's visit to London, and an intense desire on his part to do something to assuage the ever-burning fire of hatred between their two fathers, and so also prepare the way for the union already so strongly desired by their mothers.

It was when Nest had gone, and he was left alone to ponder over all these things, that the thought came to him one day of his boyish talk with Rees Thomas, on that dreadful occasion when he first was set to work in the mine. Could he really be what Rees Thomas had suggested, a mining agent, and work for the improvement of the condition of the colliers? And if so, would he not, by the same means, have a new power in his hands, wherewith to influence his father, win him back to affection, respect, confidence—nay, might he not even thus become the instrument commercially of his father's salvation?

At first he could not but shrink from the scheme, in terror and disgust, and with the resolve that nothing should tempt him into so individually dangerous a course.

But however he let his thoughts go out in

other directions, they were always driven back by the inexorable logic of the facts, and seemed to say to him, 'This is the one and only thing you can do ! Evade it at your peril !'

Then he reasoned with himself, as with one towards whom he had been too hard, too inconsiderate in judgment. He began to recal what had been done, in spite of terror, dislike, and the instinctive shrinkings of bodily sense, for mining to him was the very desolation of abomination. He had gone down at his father's demand ; had stayed and worked ; had complained to no one, but to Rees Thomas. So, again, he had borne Griffith Williams's whip in silence, and refused to tell his father till silence was no longer of avail. Above all, he, a home-loving, shrinking, sensitive lad, had ventured forth into the great world, knowing no one, and in extreme poverty, rather than be a witness against Mr. Williams. Were these not acts of courage ? Why, then, must he ever be harping on the same string of self-doubt, self-accusation, self-abasement ?

He would do so no longer. He would accept the fate to which he was called. He would

spend his leisure hours and his spare pocket money in mastering the rudiments of scientific mining knowledge; and, when that was accomplished, would get some man of repute to take him as a pupil, and accept hard work in lieu of premium.

He decided upon doing this; but even in doing so felt, as men have been known to feel in facing some extraordinary danger, a desire to shut the eyes, and rush blindly on. He, too, felt he must shut his eyes, until he was committed beyond possibility of recall.

He began, he grew weary, depressed; he stopped.

For one week only. Then with a new sense of vigour he began again, and never afterwards faltered.

By degrees he obtained some reward. The study fascinated him. He saw, that as men had already begun to discover that the very oldest of the arts, agriculture, was the one about which they knew the least, so in the ancient art of mining, everything remained rude, primeval, strong; but chaotic, reckless—successful only in

producing coal ; but obtaining that in a manner degrading and dangerous to the labourers, and accompanied by an average death-rate that ought to be esteemed disgraceful, in the last degree, among a brotherhood of Christian men.

Slowly did he thus prepare himself for the work of the future ; and, while doing it, felt the conviction grow upon him, he was morally strengthening in character, and that physical apprehensions had less hold upon him. But even as he felt this he trembled, and turned away from the subject, not daring to dwell on it.

He became a favourite with his employers, and thus was often entrusted with matters of importance not usually assigned to one so young. But he came out of all such trials well ; and, in one or two instances, he received the special thanks of the firm.

About this period a report in a newspaper attracted his attention to his father's name. He read with pain and sorrow the paragraph.

It showed that the lull in litigation had come to an end, that the old hatred was bursting out with new fury, and, no longer satisfied with local fame, was about to appear in a supreme court.

What could he do ? After long pondering, he

made a business excuse to call upon the London firm that had the management of his father's cause. The moment Israel's name was mentioned, the solicitor said, with visible irritation,

‘I am quite tired of the whole business, and wish somebody else would take it out of our hands. And now he wants capital to work the mine! Well, I could get it, but only to ruin alike lender and borrower, for Mort will not keep out of the law. It has become a more needful kind of meat and drink to him.’

David, seeming to be interested only in the business aspect of the affair, went back to his employers, and then told them, for the first time, his true name and story; spoke of the value of the mine; and the upshot was a transfer of the cause to his employers; and his being sent down to see and judge for himself, to make a careful report, and meantime to avoid committing them in any way to an actual promise to advance money.

It was also understood between them, and to the convenience of both parties, that David should, for the present, preserve his assumed name, and be known only to his father as their representative.

These then were the influences that had finally brought him back to his own native village, under a new name.

Well, he had committed himself for life. And must now test himself, by a descent into his father's mine, and by prolonged stay there, for the purpose of an exhaustive examination; one that could not be free from hazard; for the mine was well known to be in a state of dilapidation and danger, compared to which the state under Jehoshaphat, when he left it, was that of a model of order and safety.

As he dwells on these thoughts, two opposing currents of feeling and aim seem finally to sweep all else out of his soul as he strives to concentrate his powers for action—the one, of great hope of doing good to the two families, and of winning Nest, by his attitude, labour, advice, and position; the other of apprehension whether the old alarms will not return upon him, should there be any, the least signs of danger, and so make failure a thousand times more disgraceful. Well, he again reminds himself, he is committed to his course, and must abide the consequences.

CHAPTER III.

CHILDREN NO LONGER.

As David rose to go away, and did indeed move a few steps onward, some impulse of remorse brought him back, as if to confess, in tears, how much he had thought of himself, how little of her and that tender nature, which adverse circumstances had so chilled, that lay beneath the sod.

He gazed on the grave, and on the pretty flowers growing over it, and on a few loose ones, now faded ; which, however, he saw must have been placed there within the last few days, and he wondered whose could have been the loving hands.

For a moment the wild idea passed across his mind that Nest perhaps came here ; but he dismissed it with a shrug of contempt for his own

egotism as he became conscious that to him Nest's supposed visit had really meant continued thought of him.

Suddenly he heard the low, sweet tones of a woman's voice singing to herself, and approaching the place where he was.

He could not see her, for she was concealed by the gnarled and decaying trunk of the grand old yew, now a ruin, but which may have once formed a veritable armoury for the bows of Welsh patriots, in days when fire-arms were not, and when Wales and England were at constant war, or preparing for war.

A peculiar smile illumined his face as he heard the sounds, and when it passed away, left there a deep colour. He stepped behind a tomb and waited to see if he were right in his divination as to the person.

A fair young creature, about twenty years of age, soon came out from the shadows behind the yew. A basket of pretty form, woven by herself from reeds, was in her hand, and the basket was full of flowers and ferns.

She came to the grave of Mrs. Mort, knelt down

by it, and began to remove the decayed flowers, and replace them by fresh ones. Then, with a little trowel that lay in the bottom of the basket, she planted her ferns.

She did this, speaking the while not as if she earnestly felt she had something particular to say, but because such speech seemed to have become a habit, a necessity to her, as relieving the too great exuberance of her gladness, or at times the too deep depression of her gloom.

‘No, no—I shall trust you no more, you idle, garish things, that are so bright and winning just while people look at you ; but when they are gone forget all you were told to do ; just as if it were you who were to be tended and worshipped, and who must sulk and die when you find nobody minds you !

‘Ah, my ferns—you are beautiful ; and will not fail me. But I must come and come again to look at you, and see you grow, even if I forget the dear one who lies beneath. Ah, that I shall never do !’

Was David right in thinking there was a change—one of deep significance and sweetness for him

—in the tone, when Nest uttered those last words after a long pause and sigh?

Whether he was or no, he left his ambush and advanced softly, so softly that for a few paces she remained unconscious of his presence.

Then as a humble bee buzzed right against David's thigh, she turned at the sound, but still unexpectantly; then flushed at the sight of the stranger, rose hastily, dropped her veil, and turned to go.

‘Nest!’ cried a deep rich voice after her.

She turned, gave one earnest, inquiring, and for the moment, hesitating look; then, with a cry of joy, advanced towards him, but stopped ere they met, and faltered out—

‘David!’

‘And yet you did not know me!’

‘No, you are so altered.’

‘For the worse?’ David asked, and looked as if solicitous about the answer; but seeing the heightened colour in her face, his own grew of the same hue, and for a moment both were silent.

‘May I walk with you—homewards?’ he asked,

as soon as he felt sufficient control over his voice to speak.

‘ Oh, yes ; mamma will be so glad to see you, and papa is away.’

They walked on silently through the churchyard, and then made for the nearest footpath that led through a narrow part of the wood, across the slope of the mountain towards the Farm.

Passing through the wood, there needed but a casual word to recall for both that day of their childish happiness—and childish trouble—when David had so unwillingly confessed to her his feelings about the mine ; and that other and dreadful day, when she had seen David under the lash of her father’s whip. But from these recollections there came but one thought now—that of their childish love—and with that the conviction, whatever it might bring in its train, they were and could be children no longer.

Presently they came to a stile. Here for the first time this morning their hands met, as David helped her over, and each felt how tremulous was that of the other.

As she paused for a moment, standing on the

top bar, poised, and looking timidly and doubtfully down, could David help thinking her the very loveliest and most graceful creature that God's bounty had ever given to the world? Need we be surprised at his fancy that if a sculptor of true insight into the capacities of his art could see her at that moment, he would passionately entreat her to stay, though but for a few moments, while he caught some dim, imperfect, but precious memorial of so happy an artistic accident?

All that was in David's face, was soon reflected back in Nest's.

As their hands had met, and felt as if they could be content never again to sever, so now their eyes met, in mute, tender, delicious eloquence, and parted not; till, for both, life's most profound, most enchanting problem was solved; and so solved as seemingly to leave nothing more to be desired on this side the grave.

Nest Williams was in truth a charming development of a simple-hearted, single-minded woman, pure, sweet, laughter-loving. She did not draw these qualities from reflection or principle, or from the training her childhood had known.

Neither of her parents had been able to help her much in such ways. But they had loved her, and she had loved them passionately in return, and thus the way had been opened for her to live her own natural, spontaneous life. She reminded you of a beauteous wild flower that you come upon unexpectedly by the wayside. A seed has happened to fall there, and the plant to germinate, in a most felicitous spot, where soil, aspect, and temperature, wind, rain, sun, and dew have all, individually and in combination, been fitted to supply its every want.

As a child she loved David; and love grew with her growth, unthought of by her, but not the less real and strong. That very business of the mine which had been so great a trouble to the boy, and of which he had felt half ashamed, in even telling Nest about his father's cruel behaviour, had only helped him in the girl's faith and imagination. So that while he, self-cast on the great world, thought only of her as a far-off thing, that might or might not be of import at some future day to him, but was only occasionally remembered in the meantime; she, on the

contrary, had dreamed and dreamed of that bright but timid boy, who had scolded her in the little wood, till she again met him in London at a most impressionable age, and the dream became for her evermore a fixed reality.

Together they roamed along; forgetting the Farm, forgetting time, forgetting duties that, on David's side at least, admitted of no delay; prattling of they knew not what, nor cared to inquire into; but chiefly of the flowers that bloomed profusely about them, and from which, in all their beauty and mystery of structure, the transition was so easy to that still more wonderful, more divine flower that blossoms perennially in the heart of man—love; and of which the love felt by the lover is but one form, one manifestation, though, doubtless, the most exquisite; and of which all forms are but links, binding us ever fast to Him of whom it has been said '*God is love.*'

At the Farm they found a little group of persons assembled in the yard, examining a new horse that had been bought for Nest to ride, as soon as she had made herself sufficiently mistress of the art of riding him.

Nest, at David's desire, went quietly up to her mother, who was among them, and whispered to her the name of her companion, while adding that he was earnestly desirous no one here should know him at present except their two selves ; and begged Mrs. Griffith Williams therefore to receive him merely as an acquaintance she and her daughter had known in London, and by the name he had borne ever since he left Wales—Knight.

Mrs. Griffith Williams did as she was desired, but continued to look at David with such comical sympathy, that Nest, who divined that David's request referred to his father, strove to draw her mother away.

But David forgot his embarrassments in a new attraction. Was that another Nest he saw—a child, so like the one he left, in leaving home twelve years ago ? He could not but turn and look at Nest, and then again at the child in wonder.

‘ My sister ; ’ said Nest, smiling ; ‘ and the little boy they are just putting on the horse's back is my brother.’

How these children, born after he had left

his native place, seemed to deepen in David's mind the sense of the long period of his absence, and of the difficulty of the reconciliation with his father he was so anxious to bring about !

Mrs. Williams bade Nest and David follow her into the house ; and there he had to explain all that had happened to him since the meeting in London ; and to hear, in return, much relating to his mother that moved him deeply.

David, however, soon forgot his sadness as he watched various little passages of arms betwixt Mrs. Williams and her servants ; Mrs. Williams and her domestic cares ; Mrs. Williams and her eldest daughter ; who, he soon saw, really managed everything in essentials, though the details and all the honours seemed to belong to the mother.

David was charmed to see how Nest veiled this intellectual superiority, if indeed she were conscious of it at all. For a time he was half inclined to think she was utterly unconscious ; till, at a certain critical moment, he caught just the faintest gleam of a smile on her face, as she succeeded in directly reversing an order given by

Mrs. Williams, with that lady's entire belief the change was due only to herself.

Martha was not, but should have been Mrs. Williams's name, for she was indeed troubled about many things. But then, again, she was troubled much more, if she happened to be without such disturbing causes. And through all Mrs. Griffith's tangle of will, and want of will, kind impulse, and sudden anger, faith in Providence, and practical belief that the Evil One's chief business was to worry her, Nest pursued the even tenour of her way, gliding like a silver thread through the whole, and thus giving the mother a clue by which to find herself when most hopelessly lost.

It was touching to see how Mrs. Williams occasionally caught for a moment just a dim glimpse of the truth, that she was guided, not guiding, dependent on, not looked to for strength. But the glimpse died out, and was forgotten, and things went on as before.

Returning to the courtyard, where the horse was being put through his paces, they waited till he had been sufficiently examined, and all his

points had been explained by the seller, who was present, and loth to part with an animal that had evidently been a favourite, as a mere matter of pounds, shillings, and pence. When every one of the bystanders had passed judgment, and, on the whole, favourably, there was a general movement made for going indoors; but it really was such a lazy, mild afternoon, and such a soft breeze had found its way from the sea into the yard—a soft, fresh, kindly, rustling breeze, that seemed to say to the children, ‘Come and catch me,’ and there was such a gleaming of sunshine between them and the door that seemed to urge them to ‘go,’ that everybody lingered.

Seeing the children’s reluctance to enter the house, Jenkyns, the farm servant, proposed a visit to the pups; a proposal eagerly seconded by them, and timidly by Nest, who still feared an explosion from her mother, before the servants, as to David’s identity.

The party, chatting merrily, ascended the steps hewn in the earth, and rock, and tree-roots, to the little orchard; that looked black and grimy in the sunshine, as if the trees complained they had

given fruit long enough, and were now too old to have any more demands made upon them.

In a stone hut behind the orchard Jenkyns had placed two families of pups, that their noise might not be a nuisance to the family, and a loud whelping soon guided the party to them. The little building had probably possessed a door once upon a time, or at least a doorway; now, however, access to it could only be obtained by climbing up the heap of fallen stones at one side where the door had most likely been, and descending through a little aperture which the stones had left. Another heap of stones inside served to go down by, in the interior. When the children had been deposited safely, out of damp and dirt, and Nest and David had followed, Jenkyns handed round the winking terriers, and the yet blind offspring of the sheep dog, with their long noses and pink feet; and apparently not more to the great amusement of the children than to that of Nest and David, whose hands seemed to be frequently coming together, accidentally, while examining the pups.

When the children had signified their choice of

a pup each, by tying round its neck a piece of torn-trimming from little Ada's frock, Jenkyns handed Nest and the children up to David, who assisted them all to get out, and placed them safely on the other side, wondering, as he contrasted all this with his recent London life, if it were but a dream.

The yard was still quiet and sunny as they descended the orchard steps. Mrs. Williams stood knitting at the house-door, and looking all the quieter that she had found such an occupation to take her thoughts a little off the stranger who wandered about by Nest's side. Old Dando sat at her feet, leaning his nose against her skirt. One of the farm boys was idling on the gate, and shouting over the field to the school children as they crossed the bridge, and they in reply screamed back, and now and then some one would lift a voice in reproof, and draw down upon the moralist peals of shrill and mocking laughter.

A word from Jenkyns soon brought the idler to his feet, and another sent him to collect the sheep up in the top field, whither his master soon followed.

‘Nest,’ said David to her, a few minutes later, as they again stood at the stile, ‘be not surprised if you do not see me for some days. I do not yet know how things will go with me when I meet my father, and it may be that I shall find it prudent still to conceal from him who I am. My business here is with him. He is expecting me at four o’clock, as the representative of a London Mining Agency, who have sent me down to see if money can be prudently advanced for the reparation and vigorous working of the mine. This is not exactly accident. The firm he applied to, refused him. I happened to hear of that, and, after some delay and difficulty, I persuaded our firm to undertake the business, and they have sent me to explore.’ He stopped speaking to look at his watch :—

‘Ah, Nest, what have you not made me do? It is past my time now.’

‘But will he not know you?’

‘If you did not, who saw me but a few years ago, how is it possible he should, who can recollect me only as a boy of twelve? Besides, the

fact that I come to him in the ordinary routine of business, suffices to turn his thoughts in quite other directions.'

'David, if he should discover you—and be angry—or violent—you will not forget that—he—is——'

'—Is my father. Nest, be sure of that.'

Late as David was, it was later still before they parted, and only after David had won from her the acknowledgment—faltering but sweet—that it was not their mothers only who had speculated on the theme that lay so near to both hearts.

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND SON.

DAVID could not but wish he might postpone till to-morrow his meeting with his father, since he was already so late. His converse with Nest had for the moment unfitted him for any other occupation than that of revelling in the recollection of every word she had uttered, every glance she had given him, and in framing out of them, and out of the picture of her form and features, an ideal being that became only too lovely, too spiritual for human life and needs.

But he had fixed a time to meet Israel ; and it would obviously be unwise to allow his father to connect his first business visit to him with the idea of unpunctuality, and with the annoyance he might thus feel.

So he addressed himself to the arduous task

before him. And, characteristically, his first thought, and fear and anxiety was connected as of old, with his father's belief in his want of manliness ; the bitterness of which was enhanced on the one hand by the instinctive feeling, that the imputation had been in part true, and might yet prove so again ; and on the other by the humiliation of the contrast he and his father presented when studied together.

The sight of the paternal home stopped the mental current, and warned him to concentrate his powers for action.

Just as he reached the house a boy met him, who asked if he was the gentleman from London expected by Mr. Mort.

‘ Yes,’ was the reply.

‘ Oh, if you please, he's at the mine, and said you'd perhaps kindly go there to him.’

David was not sorry to be spared just yet the sight of the rooms where his mother had lived and died. He quickened his steps, and, accompanied by the boy, soon reached the little counting-house attached to the surface works ; where, on the threshold stood a man, his face glowing in the

light of the afternoon sun, from which, however, he did not seem to care to shade his eyes.

Israel advanced a step or two to meet the stranger, and said inquiringly—

‘ Mr. Knight ? ’

‘ Yes.’

They shook hands, David nervously wondering if his father would notice the trembling of his fingers ; and entered the little office, where, after David had taken a seat on the only chair, and apologised for being so late, Israel set him thoroughly at his ease by begging him to let him finish a letter for the post, when he would be quite at his service.

David took care to sit with his back to the light, so that his father should not see clearly what David was very much afraid of—the play of his countenance ; and, in consequence of this, he was able to see his father in just the opposite position, with the light full upon him.

What a powerful head and face it was, thought David, as he studied it ; and what a manly form ! It was more erect than he previously remembered it ; more obviously accustomed to walk on—rather

than, as of old, to burrow through the earth—it no longer seemed to glide sinuously, but rather to dominate—tower solidly, as self-respecting, and accustomed to the respect of others.

Strength of all kinds seemed to have combined in his father. David forgot for the moment, in his instinctive admiration, Israel Mort's want of imagination—the very quality for lack of which David had so cruelly suffered in boyhood.

Israel was dressed better than David had ever before seen him, but not as if he cared any more about such trifles than in old times.

In one thing he was greatly changed, David fancied. The hardness of the face might remain for others, but for him it had died out. Every line was softened, while the features as a whole had become so expressive that it was difficult to recal their old stony or metallic blank.

Was it through the loss of his wife? Or through his, David's, own absence; or through the gradual consciousness that power and material prosperity were not the only things needed in this world, even by men like Israel?

It certainly could not be due to the bitter

litigation that he and Griffith Williams still carried on.

Yes, Israel looked softened and weary, David thought; and his heart warmed more and more towards his father as this conviction became strong.

‘And now, sir, to business,’ said Israel, as he sent away a letter by the boy. ‘Of course you’ll stay with me? Shall I send for your things to my house?’

‘Well, no, thank you, for I have already settled as to my lodging. I was so charmed as I came along with a cottage I saw—’

‘Rees Thomas’s?’ asked Israel, quickly.

‘Yes, that was the name.’

‘You couldn’t have done better,’ responded Israel. ‘They are people much esteemed. He is my Deputy.’

‘Indeed,’ said David, as if quite a stranger to the man spoken of. Then he added,

‘My principals have already, I believe, informed you by letter that they have accepted the proposal made by your present agents to transfer your legal business to them?’

‘What was their motive in throwing me over?’ demanded Israel; and it was wonderful how David felt all the old harshness of tone thrill through him.

‘You wish me to be candid, sir, and speak the simple truth?’

A faint smile passed over Israel’s face as he replied—

‘I am a bad hand at anything else. But you are a young man, and it’s natural you should be diffident. Speak out, sir, like a man to a man.’

‘Well, they were alarmed about the litigation, and its being so apparently endless; and they were much annoyed about what the judge said when the last action was decided, that it was a case that ought never to have been brought into court, and that hundreds of pounds had been spent over a contest about a bit of wild land that was not in itself worth twenty shillings.’

‘That’s true as regards my enemy, false as regards me; for that bit of land includes a slice of the mine, and must be maintained at all hazards.’

‘Well, Mr. Mort, such were the reasons why your late advisers in London wished to resign the agency.’

‘And not fear of the money advances I required for the improvement and development of the mine?’ asked Israel, with obvious anxiety.

‘Certainly not, sir,’ said David. ‘They told us they were quite prepared to meet your views that way, if you would meet theirs, by consenting to let them come to a final compromise with Mr. Griffith Williams.’

‘Which I said plainly I would not,’ said Israel, with increasing anger and irritation.

‘Precisely, sir; and therefore we took the matter up, and shall try to please you better.’

Israel looked for the moment as if this accommodating spirit came too abruptly for him to have faith in it. Like a fierce mastiff about to fight for a bone, he was as much taken aback as the animal would be, if his canine antagonist were capable of suddenly handing the bone politely to him with a handsome apology. He gazed scrutinisingly in the young man’s face; which, screened by the partial shade, bore the examination

tolerably well, and gradually recovered his genial equanimity.

‘We will talk the law quarrel over another time.’ And then he added, ‘Perhaps, Mr. Knight, like other men I have known, I may prove less obstinate when I am sure of having my own way.’

‘Just what I said, sir,’ cried David with sudden animation.

‘Indeed! You have, then, been speculating about me, eh?’ The words, and the penetrating look that accompanied them, confused the young man for the moment; who, however, managed to reply—

‘In business, you know, sir, one must try to understand the characters of people we may have to deal with in important matters.’

‘True; and the remark shows you have got an old head on your young shoulders. How old may you be now?’

‘Not yet thirty,’ said David, trusting to his beard to conceal the difference between that which his words suggested, and the truth.

Israel’s look rested on his son’s face for some moments, and when it was removed a half audible

sigh escaped the strong man, the source of which David could not but venture to think and hope was himself.

‘Your first business will be to examine the mine, I suppose?’ remarked Israel.

‘Yes; and my second to make my report to my employers.’

‘When will you be ready?’

‘Immediately—that is to say, to-morrow.’

‘Will you require assistance? Would you like me, or my Overman, or Deputy, to accompany you?’

‘I am bound to say no. Mine must be an independent report, and not only that, but must be like Cæsar’s wife, not suspected of being anything else.’

‘Of course, of course;’ said Israel, while looking, David fancied, rather blank.

David could not but notice the look, and strove to re-assure his father, by saying these arrangements would be reported in London, and must tend to strengthen the case should circumstances warrant a favourable view.

‘Have you had much experience in mining?’

You won't be offended, I hope, but I confess my surprise to find one so young sent on such a mission.'

'Early in life,' said David, steadying his voice as well as he could, 'I hated mines and everything about them, and left my home and friends, rather than be trained up to deal with them.'

'Where did you go from?' interposed Israel, abruptly, and with his eye fixed, as David felt, on his face.

There was no help for it. He must play the Jesuit, and lie in what he meant to be a good cause.

'From Tynemouth,' he said, shocked as he heard his own words.'

'Oh ;' said Israel, his tone palpably relapsing into the state of comparative indifference out of which he had been suddenly roused.

David then went on :

'And I was a good deal knocked about the world in consequence, and more than once felt inclined to give up the ghost. But a little incident made a friend for me, and——'

‘What might that have been?’ again interrupted Israel.

‘I was errand-boy to my first employers, and one day a sum of money was missing, and I was charged with the theft; and circumstances did look black against me, for I had paid away a shilling that happened to be known by some peculiarity, and which was identified as a part of the missing fund. How did I obtain the shilling? they asked. And I could not answer.’

‘Could not? What does that mean?’ demanded Israel, harshly.

‘You shall hear, sir. They threatened me, and finally gave me in charge, and I was locked up in a horrible place, and spent a night such as I can never forget; but when I was on my way next morning to the police office, the persons in charge were overtaken by other officers, and we all went back to the station; where was my principal employer, who begged my pardon before them all, and said he knew now beyond all question I was innocent, for the guilty party had confessed.’

‘And the guilty party?’ queried Israel, as if

still dubious of the truth of the story, while inclining to wish it true.

‘Was his own brother ; he is dead now, or I should not expose him.’

‘That was the cause of your lift in life, was it?’

‘Yes. They kept me employed, but in tasks of a more and more pleasant kind, and caused me to be educated ; and then I wanted to please them, and also I wanted to get on ; and they had for acquaintances my present employers, whose chief business was in mining. I often heard them complain how difficult it was to find men with scientific training, who could give the art of mining the benefit of the increasing knowledge of our time. So I began to read mining books, and then I got interested ; and by degrees they found what little I picked up proved of use ; and at last they were so good as to allow me—under articles to them—to go through quite a course of mining studies ; and I was lucky in passing an important examination, and—and so in the end they were satisfied, and tried me practically, and there too I satisfied them, and—and—yes—that is all my story.’

‘Young man, I don’t know which I like best, the story or the telling of it. You see me perhaps moved by it. So I may tell you I had a son, who might have been just what you are—but, however, it’s too late to think of that now. Tomorrow then you will begin operations?’

They shook hands and parted.

CHAPTER V.

IN SUSPENSE.

ANXIOUSLY did Israel Mort watch for the close of the first day of the stranger's labours in the mine, hoping, when they met, to judge how far he had been satisfied with the prospect of things.

But in vain he hung about the grimy office, waiting for Mr. Knight's re-ascent, hour after hour, at the time he expected him, between four and six in the afternoon, when the bulk of the men were leaving work.

The Deputy, Rees Thomas, when spoken to on the subject, could give no further information than this : Mr. Knight had with him two persons—his assistants, evidently skilled in the technical and scientific details of mining ; that whenever he, Rees Thomas, came across them, they were all busily at work with paper and pencil, and

measuring and other apparatus ; but that their leader evidently wished not to be spoken to ; for he, Rees Thomas, confessed to have been sufficiently curious to wish to have a little talk with him, till he found that gentleman courteously but plainly intimate by his behaviour that his, Rees Thomas's, departure would be more desirable than his stay.

To Israel's great surprise, he learned, late in the evening, Mr. Knight did not intend to leave the mine at all, till he had finished ; and had accordingly sent for provisions, and for the top coats, cloaks, &c., of the three, so that they might lie down for an hour or two, when they needed rest.

‘Well done,’ thought Israel to himself. ‘That young fellow has the right stuff in him, after all, though he did seem to be somewhat over-impressionable.’

When the second day ended, the job was still unfinished, but there were no signs that Mr. Knight faltered in his purpose. Fresh provisions were sent for, implying at least a second night's labour.

A brief but kind note from the young man reached Israel with this last demand. It was, however, simply to thank him for various little delicacies and comforts Israel had caused to be added from time to time to their list of wants; and begging him not to trouble any more, as they had all they could with any propriety make use of, under the circumstances.

Israel could not make out from this whether Mr. Knight was really pleased and thankful at what he had done, or whether it was not, as he suspected, a hint that he would rather be freed from any favours. At all events, the note stopped all further personal courtesies on his part.

It was curious how the fact of the young fellow's choosing to sleep in the mine interested Israel, and set his thoughts speculating on the reason.

The desire to continue his duties by night Israel understood perfectly well; for then, though some labour still went on, the mine was at its quietest. No trams went knocking about, no places were inaccessible, no eyes were overlooking them, which might be made use of to report to Israel about

their doings, and so try to discover their every suspicion, fear, or thought.

But the sleeping there! That he could not understand under any other conditions than such as make colliers sometimes sleep—that is, over-fatigue, and therefore taken almost without intention.

Could he have looked into the young man's breast, these speculations would indeed have assumed new and deeper significance. It was, in a word, David's fright about the mine, and about his own possible behaviour there, that first made him determinedly shun, as far as possible, all observation; and then, through excess of fear, perform an act of signal courage; that was, resolve not to leave the mine at all till his work was done, in order that he might the sooner get out of it altogether.

As to Rees Thomas, David had of course known him instantly, and for the moment had been strongly tempted to speak to him. But fear of discovery checked the desire, and impelled him almost churlishly to get rid of his old friend's inconvenient presence, even while he yearned to

ask him about his face and the accident that had so disfigured him.

How David did master the inward swellings of heart, as he worked in that dangerous place ; as he moved on, examining the most inaccessible spots, and which were necessarily the most threatening ; as he saw places where a Fall had actually occurred, and become the scenes of sad but unnoted tragedies beyond the immediate neighbourhood ; and where the roof had been propped and made passable with the least possible expenditure of wood and labour ;—how he bore all this, while seeming to his assistants only deeply immersed in all the duties of his office, no one knew ; nor was he ever after inclined to dwell on this, the period of his greatest self-struggle, and self-sacrifice.

They finished their task before daybreak on the morning of the third day ; and when Israel came to the pit mouth at five o'clock, to see how they were getting on, he found that the man he had waited for so long, and so anxiously, was gone : he and his assistants : leaving neither message nor letter behind !

‘Looks bad!’ ejaculated Israel. ‘The beginning of the end, I suppose!’

He said no more, but his face seemed to get back all its former hard, rigid, stone-like aspect; and to utterly lose that almost indescribable sense of sadness that had stolen over it ever since the day of his first meeting with the young Civil Engineer from London.

Was it true, he had again and again asked himself, that which he had said, that David might have been just such another? Could he have had the ability, the self-possession, the modesty, the prudence, the business sagacity of this young man? Probably not. Excellent things do not so readily repeat themselves in this barren world, thought Israel. But David might have fallen short of this man, and yet have been a wondrous support to Israel.

Where was he? What doing? Could he, Israel, change and forego his long-cherished determination to make his son yield, come to him and ask forgiveness, or remain in estrangement, his very place and mode of life unknown, uncared for?

He feared this young Mr. Knight, even while he respected him. Israel had faith in his power to influence those he came in contact with for his own advantage ; but, somehow, this man, on whose opinion so much depended, had shown clearly he knew his duty to his employers, and meant to fulfil it without bias of fear or favour.

And then Israel asked himself a question that for him was something wild, grotesque, portentous—Had this young fellow any heart ?

‘He seemed to like me—to be interested in me ; and I suppose it was through that I liked and got interested in him ; and yet, though he can easily guess this capital question is one of life and death to me, he goes off without even a word or a look that may show me I have something to hope for from his report.’

A trying week of suspense followed ; one that seemed as if it were likely, unless soon ended, to seriously unsettle Israel’s methodical habits, if not modify his character.

He began to look out for the postman, and to go to meet him. On the first occasion, he made

it appear to be an accident, and so no notice was taken.

But next day, the postman found him in the same place waiting, and not troubling to offer any pretence of casualty in their meeting, for Israel merely said,

‘Anything for me?’

‘No,’ said the postman, as he passed along, wondering what letter could be so important as to make Israel do a thing he never remembered him to have done before in his lifetime. Was the mining boy, David, about to turn up at last as a man, or what?

But when a third time he was thus met, and a fourth, and yet a fifth, the postman began to feel almost as much interested as Israel Mort in the question of this expected letter, and to feel an increasing desire to apologise for not having it.

But on the sixth morning, an air of unusual elation was visible to all the people he called on, on his way to the mine, and they wondered why he was in such good spirits, the weather being so bad, and provisions so dear.

He had got the letter!

He felt sure it was the right one. It looked so large, and official, and bore such a magnificent seal in red wax, where he could read the words ‘Mining Agents.’

The moment he caught sight of Israel in the distance, he could not help a very unofficial act: he held the letter up in his hand, for Israel to see; who nodded, but, instead of advancing, sat down on a tree stump, and calmly waited.

He took it with impassive face, but with a word of thanks too, and, after a glance at the seal, put it in his pocket.

Perhaps he did this, seeing a tendency on the part of the postman, who was now at the end of his beat, to linger—nay, even to put off his official character, and have a chat with him.

That act, at all events, reminded the postman of a letter yet undelivered on the road, through an accident, and, mentioning the circumstance, he hurried off.

When he had gone, Israel took out his letter, opened it, and read as follows:—

‘Dear Sir,—Mr. Knight having made a careful

examination of your mine, has since then reported to us the result.

‘ We deeply regret to say it is, to *our* minds, unsatisfactory. While Mr. Knight felt bound to inform us how extreme was the state of dilapidation into which the mine had been allowed to fall, and the very heavy outlay that *must* be incurred before it could be safely and profitably worked, he also added, what it is but right you should know, that he was satisfied, alike from the past history and the present capabilities of the mine, that such outlay might be wisely made; and that a large annual profit would result after every deduction for interest on capital, and unforeseen contingencies.

‘ We wish we could share this view. We had really desired to carry out the matter for you, in spite of the embarrassments accompanying Mr. Griffith Williams’s part-ownership, and hostility to you and to all your efforts for re-organising. But with every confidence in our young engineer, we think he overlooks the danger that, it seems to us, exists *now*; and which may on any day, or hour, perhaps result in some overwhelming

calamity, before the work of reparation can be so far advanced, as to make the undertaking ordinarily safe.

‘We must, then, though with extreme regret, decline to proceed any farther in the matter.

‘Mr. Knight’s report to us is quite at your service, if you think well to use it, in trying elsewhere.

‘We are, Dear Sir,

‘Yours respectfully,

‘EDWARDS AND MORGAN.’

CHAPTER VI.

EVIL OMENS.

ISRAEL sent for the report offered, had copies made of it, began again with renewed energy to seek for capitalists and capital by its aid, but all the while the iron had entered into his soul; he was, in fact, at last hopeless.

If—he reasoned to himself—men who were so strongly inclined to help him as this Mr. Knight and his employers evidently were,—if they could not help him, was it likely any others would?

The answer was simply, decisively, fatally, No!

He was sitting one night after despatching important letters in various directions, when his aged housekeeper came in, and began to tell him of things the superstitious colliers had been telling her, and which had made her uncomfortable. One was that a pigeon had lighted on the sheaves

of the pulleys over the shaft of the mine the other morning, and excited so much alarm among the colliers, that they refused to go down, and said they were sure something was going to happen.

‘Anything else?’ demanded Israel in quiet scorn, which put the old woman—herself half a believer—on her mettle.

‘Well, Mr. Mort, you may laugh, as you always do, at such tales, but the cocks have been crowing just before and after midnight last night, and the night before, and the night before that, and everybody knows that’s a sign of warning that somebody’s going to die.’

‘How can you be such an old fool?’ was Israel’s ungallant and only comment.

‘Why, didn’t the wife of the foreman of the smiths die lately; and didn’t the cocks, that couldn’t possibly be quieted while she lived, stop directly the breath was out of her body? The husband killed one in his anger and fright, but the rest went on all the same till she died, and then were mute. Ah, Mr. Mort, if you would only read your Bible you’d see things differently. Think of St. Peter and his cock crowing.’

Israel got up and walked about, partly to silence the drivel of the old woman, partly to dissipate the gloomy feelings that affected him, before she should be silly enough to fancy he was influenced by what she had said.

A knock at the door came like a relief.

‘Come in!’ shouted Israel, who made it his pride to be as homely and accessible as ever to his workpeople and neighbours.

It was Rees Thomas, the rebellious Deputy of twelve years ago, who came in; looking wonderfully strong and well, and showing the same resolute front, that seemed to fear nothing but God, and to find *that* fear ever swallowed up in the perfect love that casteth out fear:

‘Mr. Mort, I have a word or two to say, that you will own must be prompted by honest conviction of their necessity. After the young man from London had left the mine, I felt a strange inclination to go all over it, following in his track. What I expected to discover, I cannot possibly explain, but I did find marks of danger, placed by him at different points, in districts where we seldom go. This made me anxious and careful.

The upshot is, the mine is just now dangerous—decidedly dangerous. The gas is bad in places where none ought to be, and——’

‘Pooh, pooh! nonsense.’

‘No, it is true. I know my duty, and now venture once—and once only—to say this to you; but I have spoken, and shall speak to no one else, because I know you do all you can, and yours is the responsibility. I beg to wish you good evening.’

Israel, who had turned away, did not answer this salutation, or perhaps know he had actually gone, for when he again turned he looked surprised, and moved as if to go after him, but stopped.

What could be the meaning of those boding cries from so many different quarters? He was a fool to ask. What did they mean? Why, nothing! He would go to bed, and spend his time more usefully in sleep than in thinking of them.

He did go to his bedroom, undressed, and lay down, but vainly strove to sleep.

A climbing plant, the Virginia Creeper, whose

red leaves shed a kind of glory over the front of the house, at this period, was outside his window. It had got loose with the high wind that had been recently growing up, and every now and then lashed with such sudden and inexplicable violence against the window, as if it were directed by some voiceless monster who wished to give an alarm, but could find no other way of doing so than this.

Israel's heart burned within him, to find himself for the first time in his life moved by influences which he had ever held, and still held, in the most boundless contempt.

But for all that he could not sleep, nor put aside the sense of misgiving of danger.

'Why not get up and go and see that all is right?' he suddenly reflected, and recovered at once his equanimity and strength at the thought of action.

The Overman, Lusty, who was, of course, in bed, lived not far off; so Israel went there, and called outside the cottage for him to come down.

'Anything the matter, master?' asked a voice that seemed muffled with the nightcap that almost

covered the head that was thrust out of a chamber window, in answer to the summons.

‘No, but I have thought of something that must be seen to. Come quickly!’

They were soon at the mine. The engines were hard at work, not in bringing up coal, but in pumping up water. The coal in the fire grate close by was burning brightly; the night-deputy busy in the office.

Israel and the Overman went down in the cage, and at the bottom found the stableman looking after the horses. The man reported all well.

Farther on—in the principal level—they found repairers at work, replacing such portions of the rotten props as could not be got at in the daytime without disturbing the colliers. In fact, the night shift had been put off by the Overman on the present occasion to allow of these repairs, as he explained more than once to Israel; who seemed, he thought, displeased to find the night shift of colliers not at work as usual. The repairers also reported all well.

Presently they turned out of the central level into one much narrower and lower roofed, where

they were soon stopped by a door, placed there to prevent the artificial air current passing along the level except when the work of the mine might require its ventilation.

They passed through that door, and closed it after them, and advanced towards another door, and were about to open it, when, to the surprise of Israel and the horror of Lusty, it opened, as if with volition of its own, away from them; while the air thus admitted came in a strong current towards them.

Lusty, who was as superstitious as he was irreligious, stood as one paralysed, and for some time could scarcely understand, much less answer Israel's question,

‘Who can be there? Some one is!’

Seeing the Overman's credulity and utter helplessness, Israel thought it prudent to offer a brief explanation. ‘It is a cross current of air of some kind—a pure accident. Let us go on.’

‘Not for ahl you could give me, Mr. Mort. Not if you'd say the mine should be ahl my own to-morrow.’

‘ Stay here, then—coward that you are !—till I come back.’

Israel went forward, holding his lamp so that he might keep a good look out for any skulking figure, but returned after some minutes, looking angry, puzzled, but also deeper than ever in gloom.

Something ran past their feet into a stall, separated from the level by a canvas screen. The Overman understood that incident: it was a rat; he sprang after it, lifted the curtain, and disappeared.

Israel had little time for further reflection on the sense or absurdity of his Overman’s pursuit of the rat. Whether Lusty had opened his lamp to see better where the animal had gone to, or whether he had fallen and broken the glass of the lamp, was never to be known; but scarcely had he been gone more than half a minute, when Israel heard a fearful explosion—and simultaneously a very river of fire burst from the stall across his eyes, and then death and darkness seemed to enter on the unchallenged possession of the mine.

CHAPTER VII.

AT LAST.

AMONG the destructive phenomena of Nature, few are more awful than those attending the explosion of fire-damp in a mine.—The sudden raising of the temperature, the blinding flame, the flash as of the most brilliant lightning, the sound as of the most tremendous clap of thunder; then the rush through all the levels of the roaring whirlwind of flaming atmosphere, breaking down, overturning, or destroying whatever it chances to meet—doors, trams, men, horses—till it reaches the shaft, and, bursting up with all the power and fury of a volcano, belches forth iron cages, pump-timbers, brattice-work forming the casing of the shaft, stone, coal, etc., while lifting from their very foundations the staging, engine-beams, machinery, and other erections at the mouth of the pit.

It seems at such times as if Nature were no lifeless congeries of underground earth, and rock, and water, and coal, and gas, such as we habitually think of, when the word is used in connection with a mine ; but a vital, sentient power ; that, patient at ordinary times, feels herself outraged beyond endurance at last, and summons all her subsidiary forces to her aid, to sweep her enemies out of her path.

Within the mine, men are thrown down without even the warning of a single second of time ; are stricken blind, sometimes permanently ; their clothes may take fire, while the wearers are scorched sometimes to a cinder.

The temperature after an explosion is occasionally raised so high as to convert the coal at the sides of the levels into coke.

The air doors, for checking and guiding the wind, being destroyed, the ventilation is reversed ; and so the stalls where the colliers may still be at work in safety get filled with steam and carbonic acid, which overpowers them too ; while retreat or movement of any kind becomes difficult, frequently impossible.

Whatever life, indeed, may still exist in the mine has to contend with an enemy as deadly as the fire-damp, and far more insidious—that is, the carbonic acid gas, just mentioned, known as the choke-damp or after-damp; which has no explosive tendencies, but simply suffocates whatever has breathing life. It has neither taste nor smell; it is at first breathed unconsciously, and so steals away the faculties that men often die before they can know they are assailed.¹

Within a few minutes after the explosion, people began hurriedly to gather about the pit's mouth, narrating to each other—some, what sounds they had heard from their several homes, and others, what they had seen; and explaining how fearful had been the vomiting of the shaft, where the whole moveable contents of the pit, including the casing of the shaft, seemed to have been lifted from the bottom with awful force, and shot forth into space. But as every one said, and with a

¹ The facts in the above summary are mostly taken from Simonin's 'Underground Life': a book to which the author has also to acknowledge himself otherwise indebted.

half-feeling of congratulation, there was less life endangered—through the time, night—than might have been expected. Had it been in the day, two or three hundred lives must have been sacrificed, whereas on the present occasion, there was not even the night-shift; so that in all, not more than a dozen men, besides the stableman, with perhaps his boy helper, would have been below. These unfortunates had doubtless perished. As yet no one knew or suspected that Israel himself, their employer, and the Overman were both below in the mine.

The state of things was indeed remarkable at the pit-mouth. Ponderous iron shears had been snapped and torn asunder like so much match-wood. Immense bolts and stanchions of iron had been twisted into the most fantastic shapes, contorted as if with extreme agony. A tall chimney standing near exhibited a gap in the brick-work, extending from the base far up. The atmosphere was still filled with clouds of coal-dust and sulphur, which the bystander inhaled with every breath. Heavy detached masses of metal and masonry lay scattered about, even to the distance of more than

a hundred yards. Crowds were seen in every direction, for miles round—east, west, north, and south ; dense throngs of men, women, and children coming and meeting at the pit-mouth. There they formed into innumerable little groups round those unfortunates whose relatives were below. Wives were crying for husbands, mothers and fathers for sons, youths for their brothers and fathers.

In strange contrast with this spectacle was that presented at one point of the outskirts of the multitude ; where a score or two of boys, thinking nothing of the calamity so near, knowing, perhaps, none of their friends were in danger, feeling only the sense of youthful and abounding life, were pursuing, with surprising skill, the game of sliding down a steep incline, one after another in rapid and unbroken succession, seated on an iron slab, and balanced on a single iron rail—the ring of the metals, and the joyous accompanying laugh, penetrating far in among the crowd, and adding a new pang to the sorrowing hearts that heard and understood.

Clergymen of the Church of England, Baptist,

Wesleyan, and other ministers, now began to arrive, and to exert themselves in comforting the mourners; while one, standing up in the vehicle that had brought him, began to pray aloud, and afterwards to address them, and to sing with them a hymn of consolation.

Among those who heard the roar of the explosion was Israel's old housekeeper, who alone knew or believed he was in the pit. Superstition lent wings to her aged feet. She came hobbling along towards the mine, convinced that now her warnings were to be realised.

A great dread and horror fell on all when they heard from her the truth.

But no one offered to go down, even if a descent were practicable, through a shaft that was in an utterly ruinous condition.

Israel's night-deputy, it will be remembered, had been absent on duty in the office above ground. [§] He came, and, after a careful examination, said it was impossible that any one could get down, and that if they could it would only be to go to certain death, for there were so many old reser-

voirs of gas in the mine, that more explosions would be sure to take place.

Even while he spoke, another explosion sent the crowd scattering in all directions, lest the flying *débris* might kill or maim them.

Suddenly there appeared among them Rees Thomas and his wife, who looked pale and delicate, and whom he seemed to be vainly striving to persuade to go back.

‘Is it true,’ he demanded of a bystander, ‘that the master, Israel Mort, is below?’

‘Ay, and dead enough, I’ll be bound.’

‘We’ll see to that. Morgan’—he spoke to the night-deputy—‘will you, in the absence alike of the master, and the Overman, James Lusty, give me authority to act, if I say I believe there may be cause for hope, and that I am willing to sacrifice my life, if necessary, in the attempt to try?’ Then he added, in so low a tone that only the two could hear, ‘Depend on me not to harm you or your position.’

‘If you like to take the responsibility, you can; but you are warned. I’d do as much as most men for my employer, but——’

‘You are right. The task is more dangerous than even the collier’s known heroism would justify. I say that to clear you. But it does not seem exactly the same to me, as regards myself. I am called here! You give me authority then?’

‘Yes.’

Rees Thomas turned to his wife, took her in his arms, and kissed her as he said—

‘Wife, dearest, we have so lived that death is not necessarily a thing we need very much fear. This is God’s work—I am sure of it. If I can save him—Israel, the strong man—thou shalt see how he will reward us. And so farewell. If we never meet again, rear up our child in thine own spirit, and I can ask no more.’

She clung to him for a moment in silent, bitter, but not all bitter, anguish; then put him from her, smiled, put her hand on her breast, and said to him—

‘I am comforted. Go.’

In a wonderfully short space of time they rigged up something to allow this Christian soldier, this one rank and file of the forlorn hope, to go down.

A rope was about his waist. He grazed his hands till they were raw and bleeding all over with the repeated collisions of his form against the sides in his descent, which his hands could alone prevent from being dangerous or fatal. But he felt not the smart ; he only longed to go more and more swiftly down.

He reached the bottom in safety. He found the stableman lying dead among his horses, as if guarding them to the last.

There he is obliged to pause, on account of the warning given by the dying light of his lamp.

But the light improves little by little, and he is able to advance.

He passes along the central level, where all is terrible silence, and partial ruin. Every instant he expects to find his way barred by the fallen coal, and masonry, and earth.

He worms his way through holes, he squeezes his way between the roof and great heaps of *débris*, he calls—but gets no answer.

He tries one level, but finds it impassable on account of the gas.

He tries another, and advances in it, but with

a sort of instinctive feeling Israel is not there ; and at last, after vainly shouting, returns without exploring it to its end, and then fears he has done wrong.

He enters a third level—and a cry escapes him—he sees dark substances on the floor.

Commending his soul to God, for the atmosphere here is to the last degree oppressive and dangerous—life and death a question of perhaps of a few seconds less or more of delay, he stoops to examine them.

He touches one of these, and there is a groan. He stoops, moistens the lips of the senseless man with tea ; the man revives, and, half unconsciously, faintly appeals to him for help. He is one of the carpenters.

Rees Thomas grasps him, lifts him with a more than mortal strength, and moves away.

Suddenly his strength is shaken. He hears a far-off voice calling. It is Israel's, he is sure of it, he would give the world to be able to put this man down and go back, but he cannot ; no, before God he feels he must not !

A new danger affects him. His way is barred.

A Fall of earth has taken place, and shut them in as in a trap.

He stoops, and bending over the man he has been carrying, prays just for one minute to his Maker, in language and thought such as only these moments can inspire : then rises with new hope and fortitude.

How wonderfully now he is served by his old knowledge of the mine ! He remembers another route by which to pass from this level to the bottom of the shaft.

It is a great comfort to him to find the mine as free from gas as it is. The repeated explosions, driving the air to the shaft, and so up to the surface, had been naturally followed by a great downward flow of pure air to fill the vacancy ; carrying back with it into the innermost recesses the deadly choke damp, and leaving the approaches comparatively free.

Again he lifts his burden, and moves on. He passes, as he expected he should, Israel ; and he hears the latter in a faint, hoarse voice cry for assistance, though what it says he cannot discover, nor stop to investigate.

But the lamp-light shows his face ; Israel knows him, and the sight seemed to bring back into him new life.

‘ Ha ! Rees Thomas ! ’

‘ Israel, I will come back ; ’ such were the words on Rees Thomas’s lips, but the burden he bore was suddenly obliged to be shifted to pass under some new obstacle, and he had the inexpressible anguish to feel that Israel had not heard, and might die in the belief of his neglect of him.

After superhuman efforts he reached the bottom of the shaft, where the air helped to revive the saved man ; and then, without a moment’s delay, other than sufficed to drink a few drops from his precious can of tea, Rees Thomas sped as swiftly back as the fearful nature of the way permitted.

A dreadful question tormented this tender-conscienced man as he went. If another victim interposed for help before Israel, ought he, or not, to save him first ? He could not answer it quite to his own satisfaction ; but he determined he would take the responsibility before God and man of saving only Israel, if one more only was to be saved through his means.

He found, when he got to the place where Israel lay, three other bodies near him. It was a dreadful business, the groping about to see their faces, and try to recognise them, as he was obliged to do, for he could not for the moment tell which was the man he sought.

Lusty, the Overman, was one of the three. He had crawled back to the place where he left Israel, and there died.

Another of the three was a repairer. He also was dead.

The third was the man he sought.

Israel had turned on his face and fainted, when his last hope expired with the departure of the Deputy.

But there he was, and, to Rees Thomas's boundless relief, still living. He felt the heart beat, he felt the slow but still warm breath on his own cheek, when he knelt.

‘Israel! Israel Mort! Be of good cheer. A friend is with thee, who will not again leave thee. A friend! Dost thou hear?’

‘A friend!’ Very faint was the utterance of the words, and dubious in their expression.

‘Ay, one whom thou hast yet to know—the Friend of all mankind. He it is who sends me here. Drink! Drink!’

Israel’s burnt and feverish lips clung unconsciously to the can, as the lips of a famished babe will cling to its mother’s breast, when nourishment comes at last.

‘Better? You are better?’

‘Ay.’ Then with strange wonder in his eyes he gasped out, ‘Rees Thomas? Thee!’

‘Ay, God be praised! But be silent now. Concentrate all thy latent powers of life within. Have faith. Now then!’

He took Israel across his lap, looking down upon him for one moment as he did so with a look of love, devotion, and heroic purpose, that Israel was too ill to catch more than the faintest reflection of; but even that sufficed to confound him utterly. He closed his eyes with the words,

‘God help me! What manner of man is this?’

Then Rees Thomas found he was once more bearing along a senseless burden, knowing not whether to life or to death.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CHARACTER IN REVOLUTION.

CAN character be changed suddenly :—in a space of time so brief, that a man can say, ‘ Thus I was up to a certain time—thus I am since that time passed over me ? ’

Or, in other words, what is this but to ask—Can the current of a man’s daily and worldly life, fed as it is from innumerable sources of his past career—of his individual desires and aims—of his peculiar experiences, temptations, errors, truths, ignorances, knowledge—of his fierce battles against his fellows, while sympathising with them in their traditional belief in the necessity of maintaining all those things that injure or destroy other and nobler kinds of sympathy ;—can all these powers and influences be at once not largely

modified only, but absolutely changed in their essential nature ; reversed ; just as if a strongly flowing river, with its tributaries, were to turn, as by its own volition, and go back the way it came, in search of some newer and nobler channel through which alone it would henceforward pass ?

Could such a question have been put to Israel Mort a few minutes before his eventful midnight visit with his assistant to the mine, he would probably have wondered for a brief space at the strangeness of it—have asked himself whether any influences could so change him—have smiled at the absurdity, and then forgotten it.

And yet even now, as Rees Thomas bears him along in arms that tremble with their too great burden, yet cling to it as if with the instinct of the possession of some new and most invaluable treasure—something which, if only it can be saved and borne to the upper world, and to the freshness and glory of day, shall make the Deputy's own life more precious in his own eyes—while Israel is thus being borne back towards the shaft, from which faint glimmerings of light now begin to

reach them, and illumine their way, his whole being is in a state of revolution, however little conscious he may be of the fact.

The inevitable slowness of the Deputy's movements causes much time to pass, which in itself tends to Israel's recovery.

He has frequently to be put down and taken up again, in order to pass over, under, or circuitously by the difficulties of the way.

On one of these occasions, Rees Thomas has felt uncertain as to his route, and gone away a few steps to explore closer.

Returning, he found, to his astonishment, Israel sitting up with his back against a mass of fallen rock.

The Deputy held his lamp to Israel's face ; and the illumination cast there by the dim light was as nothing to the inner radiance that almost transfigured the fire-scarred, storm-beaten face of the Deputy as he met Israel's faint smile, and listened to the half-inarticulate words, slowly and laboriously uttered—

‘ I thought you had left me to my fate.’

‘ I shall never leave you till I have placed you

in His hands whose servant I am, and whose service will yet be yours. Come !'

Israel gazed on the Deputy's features with all the wonder and earnestness that were possible to him under his physical state—gazed as if this were a problem he must master at any cost, and yet could not; then shut his eyes, strove to rise, but was unable to lift his weight; then again knew no more till a few minutes later he found himself near the sump, or water-pit, looking up through the shaft wistfully to the faint light at the top.

Glancing round for the Deputy, he saw him coming toward him with a pitcher of water. Israel drank from it, drank again and again, and was wonderfully refreshed; and would have gone on drinking while a drop remained in the vessel, but the Deputy took it from him with gentle force, and dashed the remainder in his face.

Israel gasped for a moment between his anger and the shock, but presently found himself so much strengthened, that he was able, with the Deputy's assistance, to stand upright; though he trembled like one who leaves his bed for the first

time after weeks of an exhausting and dangerous illness, and he knew he should utterly collapse and fall if Rees Thomas' arms were but for a moment withdrawn.

‘Could you, do you think, sit astride the bar I had rigged up to descend with, you being on one side the rope, and I the other?’

‘Yes,’ feebly responded Israel, ‘if——’

‘I know; if I hold you. Of course I shall hold you.’

Then he led him toward where the rope hung, and which was quivering with the latest of the many anxious signals of enquiry passed from above; and after a minute or two Israel was not only safely seated on the crossbar, and his hands clenching the rope, but had a rope so securely lashed round his waist and shoulders, that even if he again became insensible, he might be borne safely up to the surface.

The Deputy now took his own seat, blew a shrill piercing note on the whistle that hung round Israel's neck, shook the rope above their heads as well as he could while he and Israel lessened the tension by supporting themselves a moment on

their feet, and after a brief and agitating pause, they found themselves swiftly moving upwards.

Too swiftly! for the rope swayed to and fro with its burden, till the men struck violently against first one side, then the other.

The Deputy, however, soon recovered his presence of mind; and with a strong stick managed speedily to keep them both tolerably safe, by keeping them from touching the walls.

‘Take care!’ suddenly cried Israel, in a voice that seemed almost like his own strong one come back. ‘Take care! There are pieces of iron and lumps of earth falling down the shaft!’

The swaying of the rope and the injured state of the shaft were indeed making their upward course exceedingly perilous. Again rose, and stronger than before, Israel’s warning cry,

‘Take care!’ Alas! it came too late; a heavy piece of iron was loosened by the rope near the top of the shaft, it struck against the side, rebounded a little towards the centre, and so fell, till it struck the Deputy on the head at the moment he was just touching with his outstretched stick the wall of the shaft.

The stick fell from his grasp, the head dropped, the hand that held by the rope relaxed ; a moment more and he would have fallen from the dreadful perch, but that Israel clasped him suddenly in his arms ; and held to him in spite of the dizziness and blows and injuries that the renewed oscillation caused ; and against which there was now no help but patient endurance, and hope that the top might yet be reached alive ; held to him, even while he was himself almost unconscious of anything but the dull confused sense of one painful shock after another ; and so they reached the surface.

Strong hands, anxious faces, and earnest hearts were there ready to receive them, while others kept off the swaying, agitated, turbulent crowd of people, from which rose every instant some anguished dreadful question that no one could answer, from those who vainly strove to get to the pit mouth, so that they might know at the earliest moment one way or another the fate of the missing ones.

The group at that moment nearest the shaft was an impressive one. The Deputy was lying on the

ground within a dark circle of forms, on which fell the first faint rays of a cold daybreak. Israel was on his knees supporting him ; and with eyes that seemed to flash and burn in the wonderful intensity of their fixed, despairing, defiant, yet tender and anguished gaze.

Could God live and let this man die? seemed the question of one moment. And then the next, Would He not spare him, even for His own gain, to be still so served? And yet again, Was he, Israel, so utterly helpless, and worthless alike to God and man, that he could offer nothing, do nothing to keep the life in there that was so swiftly hurrying away?

The Deputy's eyes had been for some time closed, but now they opened a little, while his lips oozed with foam ; but as he slowly recognised Israel, a smile, such as only his Divine Master, Christ, could have inspired, broke over it, and his lips moved, though to Israel's distress no sound came with the effort.

‘Try again,’ he said, with a touching effort to modulate the returning harshness of his own voice, ‘while I listen.’

He bent down, and succeeded in hearing a few words.

‘Israel—my—my—wife—and—’

‘They are mine if you die. I swear it;’ interrupted Israel, perfectly conscious of all he was saying; yet doing it as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him or anybody else to do; and only unconscious of—thinking, caring nothing about—the sudden revolution of his whole being consummated in this solemn undertaking.

‘Did I not say?—’ burst out the Deputy with a flash of enthusiasm that overmastered for a moment the deadly faintness that possessed his whole frame—

He paused, breathless; his face again clouding, his eyes half closed.

‘What?’ asked Israel.

‘That you are mine—bought with my blood, and now belong to Him who bought me and all of us. Living or dying, I claim you for Him!’

His head dropped on his breast. Israel felt his weight increase, and gently lowered him nearer, nearer still, to that mother-earth, which seemed again to yearn for her child, till at last

he lay prostrate ; Israel bending over him rigid as a statue of stone, and with an expression on his face that seemed to be as stern and immovable as if his lineaments were indeed carved on the stone.

A low whisper of ‘ He is dead ! ’ was now heard from among the bystanders ; and it was taken up and repeated, again, again, and again, till the crowd that had become suddenly silent, as aware of the tragedy within which they could not get close enough to see, became agitated with comment, discussion, and increasing but vague alarms as to the extent and consequences of the night’s calamity.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

FOR two days the only question in Dr. Jolliffe's mind was not whether either of the two men would live, but which would die first.

But on the third day, the doctor found, on making his usual rounds, two couches, placed opposite and near each other in Israel's sitting-room; and that these were occupied—the one by Israel, the other by the Deputy.

Though a certain something noticeably subdued in demeanour had begun to appear in Israel while the men were handling him and the Deputy immediately after the accident; and when their lightest touch could not but enhance the almost intolerable physical anguish he endured from burns, bruises, and shattered nerves; he had burst out in anger when, forgetting his orders

to take the Deputy, whom he refused to believe dead, to his (Israel's) own house, they moved away with the senseless frame in quite a different direction, the one leading to the Deputy's own house.

And Israel was right. Nature and the doctor together brought back Rees Thomas' wandering forces of life—wandering as if to seek a final exit. He had been stunned, not killed—though a new danger threatened, even more serious still, insanity.

Israel quickly recovered. The splendid natural stamina of the man helped him through. He was burnt in many parts; but happily had defended his face with his hands, when he saw, or almost felt before he saw, the river of fire passing over him; and the hands, though very painful and inflamed, were much protected by the black gloves that Israel happened to wear.

He had worn these gloves for the first time at the death of his children; a second time at the death of his wife; and then, frugal as ever, he put them by, till he chose to remember, as if determinedly ignoring David, he had no more deaths to look for, except his own, and as

he could hardly wear them at *that* funeral, he had better wear them now. And so he began to put them on now and then, though he was almost more comfortable without than with them ; except when, as on the night of his going forth chilly from his warm bed into the air, he needed them.

Israel, as he lay on the couch and thought of many things, often thought of and looked at his hands, as if wondering what life would be to one so busy and restless, were he to lose them, or have them rendered useless.

‘No bones were broken,’ he told the doctor before waiting for the doctor to tell him ; and as to bruises, why, that was the doctor’s business ; and so Israel dismissed at once all further personal care about the many surface injuries he had received ; and about the pain which was, as the doctor knew well, extremely great, especially when the times for dressing the wounds came round.

As to Rees Thomas,—once, when the doctor came in, obeying the signal Israel gave, he went to the Deputy, felt his pulse, raised the lids of his eyes, and spoke to him, but without receiving any kind of answer, or sign that he had been heard.

Taking a phial from his pocket, he poured out the contents into a wine-glass, and asked the Deputy to drink.

Still receiving no reply, he touched his lips with his fingers, after dipping them in the mixture, and then put the glass to them. Mechanically they opened, and little by little the doctor managed to get the whole swallowed.

After another prolonged and earnest look, the doctor crossed to Israel, and said in a low voice :

‘He will sleep now, and when he wakes—if he ever wakes—he will be either a confirmed madman or on the way to a rapid and decisive cure. I am hopeful. If, as I am inclined to believe, he has just passed safely through the one critical moment when Nature makes her last effort for salvation, the present state is only the natural reaction from so violent a struggle, the intense and inevitable yearning for rest, which must be had, no matter at what cost. If it does not mean that, it means, as I have said, death or insanity.’

‘Then he will require to be kept quiet for many days?’ said Israel, after a prolonged and gloomy fit of silence.

‘Certainly,’ responded the doctor.

‘All right. Then I must be up and stirring.’

‘Not to-day,’ said the doctor, with quick decision.

‘Why not?’ sharply demanded Israel.

‘Because you will almost certainly have a relapse if you do, and because I bring you news that will convince you there is no occasion. Already, and without waiting for your letter, they have sent you from the Penman Coed colliery one of their most experienced viewers to lead a detachment of six-and-twenty picked men, and they are now about to venture down and examine into the actual state of things, and do whatever seems most necessary on the spur of the moment.’

‘Thanks! thanks!’ ejaculated Israel slowly, and, as the doctor thought, almost grudgingly. Perhaps he felt all the misgivings natural to a man who has been long concealing from the world a perilous secret, and sees the moment arrive when others must get upon the track, and may suddenly expose him to the shame and scorn of his fellows, perhaps drive him from society to seek thenceforward the haunts known only to despair.

If he could but have been there with the explorers to go through the mine with them! To say the right word, suggest the right thought at the precise moment that might make both so valuable! To lure them in this direction, or to check them in that!

‘Well now, Mr. Mort,’ said the doctor, as he took up his hat to go, ‘promise me to be quiet three days, and I promise you not only to let you off after that, but to do all I can in the meantime to fortify you against what you must expect to see and hear—when you again venture to the mine.’

‘Ay—that’s it! What I must see and hear! And do you think, doctor, I have done anything else but see and hear since I came back to this place in this company? The groans of the dying—the faces of the dead—the reproachful cries of the women and children—this is the sort of devil’s music and devil’s show to which I have been listening and on which I have been gazing ever since. And the sleeping your drugs give me—or what you call sleeping—is worse than any waking. I can by sheer force—doctor, stare at me if you

like;—but I can, I say, by sheer force, while I have got all my faculties about me—fight, and fight hard, with all this hideous phantasmagoria, and put down a deal of it; and what I can't, I can bear—as a man should. But in sleep all sorts of ghastly, creeping, nameless, monstrous creatures—things hatched in the mine, but things I never saw, nor ever expect to see, there—seem to know that I am made suddenly helpless, that I have no arm of will to strike at them—that I am ripe for suffering, impotent to resist—and the knowledge seems to put a new spirit into them, a kind of jovial madness over their prey—so that——'

He paused, wiped his brow, seemed to shun the doctor's glance, then said with a great and most painful change of voice, as if he had but newly discovered that his crown of strength—a crown, even if one of iron—was being taken from him, and that thenceforward all things were possible, no matter to what extent of degradation they might carry him,

'What was I talking about, doctor? But there! it doesn't matter.'

The doctor was much embarrassed, but thought

it best to be silent, and let Israel continue as he pleased.

But Israel knew—no man better—the value of silence, and so offered neither explanation nor apology for his recent excitement.

The doctor again took up his hat, which he had put down, and then grasped with his usual cordial grasp, as though nothing particular had happened, the hand of Israel; which was so damp and altogether unsatisfactory to the doctor that he held it, unresistingly, and looked into Israel's eyes, which were wild and rolling. The touch and look, both full of sympathy, affected Israel as he had never been affected before by such mute agencies. He pressed the doctor's hand, and grew calm.

After a little pause, he again broke the silence, and said with a something on his face that looked more like a true smile than the doctor had ever seen on it before :—

‘I meant to have got rid of all this sad stuff before you came—I meant him yonder to have had the benefit, not you.’

The doctor laughed, and then they chatted a while on ordinary subjects, though Israel seemed

as if wanting yet to say something, and at last it came out:

‘It is but a cowardly way—to shut your eyes when you see dangers ahead. I’ve been trying to manage it, but can’t. So, doctor, be prepared. I fear very much this explosion, which luckily has not yet cost us much in life, whatever else it may cost’ (and there the doctor knew by the pause that a heavy sigh had escaped Israel, but that he had smothered the sound of it), ‘will be followed by other explosions. I ought to be there, you see. I ought to warn the party of explorers. I must do it—I will—ay, and at once!’

He stood up, and looked for the moment as if he could go forth and fulfil whatever duty or self-interest might demand.

‘They are down in the mine by this time, and they are certainly taking all possible precautions;’ said the doctor, standing directly before Israel, his attitude and breadth of form seeming to say, ‘I’ll argue with you if that’ll do; but if not, then you shall have what you’re so fond of—force.’

‘They are down, are they?’ echoed Israel in a tone which might be either resignation or discon-

tent, so curiously did it seem to hover between both. He sat down, and so far satisfied the doctor.

Another day passed, and with great improvement for Israel. The Deputy also seemed better ; for although he scarcely moved, there was something in the eye when it opened, and looked round, that suggested to Israel consciousness and sanity were slowly but surely coming back.

Israel's first display of growing recovery was the demand on his old housekeeper to bring him a table, also paper, pens and ink, all of which he immediately made use of in writing a little note, and folding it up, but which he did not address, as the Deputy reclining opposite him, and watching Israel, seemed to notice ; though whether understandingly the latter could not say, as the Deputy had not yet spoken a single word, or given a single clear sign of mental recovery.

Rees Thomas also seemed to notice that on the doctor's next visit to them Israel put this note into the doctor's hands as if it were a matter of course and of little importance.

Perhaps the doctor saw the Deputy's look of

enquiry ; for, after reading it, and dressing Israel's wounds, when he crossed to the former—being then between the two men—he smiled significantly, and held out the note in front of his breast for the Deputy to take without attracting Israel's attention. When the doctor had gone, and Israel had dropped off into a fitful slumber, the Deputy, reviving a little in strength, read what had been written :—

‘ Look after him. If I and the mine are to be ever worth a pin, he must be saved, set up, made strong. Get extra advice if you think it necessary. Whatever must be paid shall be. Take my word for that.

‘ I. M.’

Was it the mine Israel cared for? Was it the business-help Israel felt he more than ever needed, and that the Deputy could so well render? Or was there something below the obvious and apparently selfish meaning—that Israel felt, but did not choose to avow, or even be suspected of?

What the doctor thought the doctor never said, so nothing could be got from him.

But what the Deputy thought may be guessed from the nervous clutch towards his Bible that lay near,—the sudden cessation of his reading, and the backward stretch of his head upon his pillow, so that he might gaze upward unseen, and breathe out the prayer his soul was just for one moment strong enough to feel, but that his voice was too weak yet to give utterance to. Then his mental powers relapsed once more into vacuity.

CHAPTER X.

AN INCIDENT OF THE EXPLOSION.

It was a great surprise to Israel, that, during these days of illness at home, he had neither seen nor heard of Rees Thomas's wife.

It was quite certain that the news of the injuries they had received from the accident and their removal together to Israel's house had reached the Deputy's mother-in-law ; for she had been met coming towards the mine in a state of fearful agitation by the messengers Israel had sent expressly to inform her ; so that she might, if she could, soften or delay the intelligence to her daughter.

Beyond that he knew nothing. And he dreaded to ask the doctor if he knew anything of the two women, lest he might hear of fresh calamity, and so directly or indirectly be tempted to tell the Deputy, and increase his danger.

The Deputy was buried in deep sleep when the doctor came on his next visit. While he and Israel discoursed together they were simultaneously attracted by a voice singing outside the house. It was the voice of a woman—thrilling, strange, and sweet.

It was a verse from a hymn that she sang, and Israel did not at first catch or recognise the words.

But she had no sooner finished the verse than, instead of going on with the hymn, she repeated the same lines, and then Israel understood them distinctly enough.

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

Israel's eye caught the doctor's enquiringly, who said,

‘Do you know where she got that?’

‘No.’

‘Yesterday, this poor woman, who has been continually haunting the pit mouth since the accident, and who, I am sorry to say, is insane,

with the shock of hearing that her husband was dead——’

‘Who is he?’ asked Israel, abruptly.

‘Let me see; what is his name?’ mused the doctor, as if trying to recollect. ‘But, no matter, just now. I will tell you the story just as it has been told to me.’ And this was in substance what the doctor related:—

The woman they had just heard singing outside had with her husband heard the explosion. They had immediately hurried to the pit mouth.

There they separated; she encouraging him in his purpose to go below and try to succour the unfortunates who might be lying there; pleading to God and man for help. But he had not long gone from her before she harrowed the hearts of all near by calling to her husband down the shaft, in accents of the most piercing anguish,

‘Husband! Dearest! Canst thou hear? It is I! Thy wife! Speak to me, or I shall die! Speak, or I must come to thee; ay, if I leap down!’

Between every phrase of invocation she stopped, leaned her head down, her ear striving to catch

the faintest response, and, obtaining none, she would begin again.

More and more passionate and wild became the cries, and the people around her took counsel one with another, as to whether she was not losing her senses, and whether she might not do, as she said, rejoin her husband by plunging madly into the abyss.

They spoke to her soothingly, and tried to draw her away homeward, by the promise they would soon go down, and see if they could find and bring him to her, but she paid no heed to their words.

So, carefully approaching her as she leaned most dangerously over the pit edge, a man caught her in his arms and had forcibly to remove her.

But her cry of anguish—her outpouring of tears—of passionate appeals for mercy, and to be let alone, and at last her burst of hysteric laughter, so appalled the man that he set her down on her promising with all the simplicity of a wayward child that she would let him hold her hand fast.

Again she called to her husband, but with a

strangely low, fervent, penetrating tone, as if it was no longer corporeal frame calling to corporeal frame, but the spirit within to the spirit within.

‘Hush!’ she said with uplifted finger, and a most moving smile playing over her pale face, ‘I shall hear him presently. He has far to come!’

So real seemed her conviction that it moved those around her to wait in half-expectation. Again she spoke to them as if they were to be also comforted by the news—

‘He is coming! I hear his light footfall. Listen! There! You heard him then surely?’

A great hush fell upon all who were near. No one could say that her husband might not be living—might not have heard his wife’s cry—might not at that very moment be about to reappear at the shaft bottom.

The suspense of the crowd became so great, that at last the man who held her—a collier of powerful voice—and who knew by experience how to make it go to the farthest possible distance, shouted down the pit.

Something was heard in reply, but the man

knew the sound well, and said, 'It's only the echo.'

But the woman passionately denied this. Again she called in that low, sweet, fervent, trustful voice—leaned her ear for the response, and then turned her flushing face towards the man who still grasped her hand, half stooping as she was, with such a bright and glad look mingling with the glance of the mad woman, that he was at once fascinated and appalled, as she whispered to him:—

'He's there! He hears me! Hark! He's too happy to speak to me, so he sings, as they say the angels do.'

'And what does he say?' asked the man.

'I can't tell, not yet. Do you listen too. I am so frightened often at the thought of him—so good, so fit only to live in heaven—that perhaps now he is angry I didn't have more faith that he was alive and would never be taken from me. Come, stoop down and listen. Oh, do ask him what he says, I entreat you!'

The man stooped, more to please and quiet her than from any expectation to hear the voice of

her lost husband ; then shook his head, and said again to her,

‘ If you heard anything, it was only the echo of your own call.’

This so excited her that she burst into transports of grief and anger, and in answer to her passionate appeals they all shouted. She again listened, and brought others to listen, and at last, to their astonishment, there was borne up towards them the sound of a man’s feeble voice.

By slow degrees they managed to discover that he had by a variety of means contrived to raise himself to a considerable height in the shaft through the débris that, to a certain extent, blocked it.

They lowered to him a can with some drink, and then, when they again heard him, he was singing a verse from a well-known hymn :—

On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

By this time a basket had been got ready. This was lowered, and in a few minutes the collier thus

wonderfully rescued emerged to the surface, and the first sight of him was enough for the poor woman who waited and watched in the most absolute faith it was her husband. A maniacal cry rang through the air, and then some of the pitying women led her home.

This was the story told to Israel—who again listened for the woman's singing. He managed with the doctor's help to get to the window. He could not yet see her, but he heard her, and it seemed she was approaching. The voice was strangely sweet and pure. It was silent again for a moment or two, then rang out more clear and piercing than ever. The air, the words, the voice, seemed to make together something that was more like the soul-burden of some prodigal angel returning to the great Father of all, than the mere voice of wandering humanity, seeking to regain its home:—

On Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wistful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

The singer now emerged from the lane by

which she was approaching Israel, and he saw, just as he had been for some minutes expecting he should see, and to his profound grief, the mad wife of his friend and deliverer, Margaret Thomas.

The doctor and he exchanged significant glances. Margaret did not, however, look miserable. Faith seemed to have lived in her, while all other intellectual qualities had for the moment died, and to have filled her with a kind of joyous light.

Israel was in no mood to try to speak to her just then, but he watched her as she passed along, till the last sweep of her garments in the wind as she turned a corner sent him back to his couch, to ask himself whether he was in any way responsible for this new and yet unknown misery for his benefactor.

CHAPTER XI.

AT THE CRAIG LEVEL.

THE second day after the explosion, while Nest still felt the sudden terror inspired by it, and by the knowledge of the danger experienced by David's father, she had a new and trying chapter of life opened to her, which enhanced a thousandfold all the terrors of the accident.

Her father, Griffith Williams, was well known to be a kind man, and, by everybody but Israel Mort, acknowledged to be a just man; but the explosion, instead of softening his animosity towards Israel, seemed to deepen it; so that he could not but exult in the proof thus afforded of the punishment that sooner or later always overtakes the wicked.

It was not—so he said—the sharp, costly, harassing litigation he had been subjected to by

Israel's freaks, still less was it the original insult attending the sale of the mine—no, it was none of these things that moved him now, as he repeatedly assured his ever sympathetic but not very clear-minded wife; but the villany of Israel's conduct in carrying on the mine all these years without making any one of the great remedial alterations that he had sworn to be necessary twelve years ago, when the money was to come out of his—Griffith Williams's—pocket.

The Squire was too hopelessly prejudiced to consider that Israel's default in that respect might be due to the failure to obtain the requisite capital.

But for this language, which Nest heard incessantly repeated, she would have obeyed the natural yearning of her heart, have gone to Israel's house, and begged permission to wait on him in his illness. How sweet that would have been to David, when he should know; and what a relief to her overcharged heart in the meantime!

On this particular day she had excused herself from the dinner table on the plea of headache. But that evil she might have borne: what she

could not bear was the constant exhibition of uncharitableness on the part of a father so dear to her, and whom she had always felt to be so worthy of honour, and against one whom she already recognised in her heart as a second parent.

For with the simple faith and hopeful imaginativeness of maidenhood, Nest saw in the distance David and his father fully reconciled; and that necessarily included for her all possible goodness on Israel's part—all possible happiness for both families when the ultimate union of both should be accomplished.

Thinking thus, she wandered out into the garden, and felt soothed by the songs of the birds, the murmur of the wild stream, and forgot for a brief space the mine and all the melancholy associations that it aroused.

As she mused, and raised and let fall with her foot a pretty tangle of flowers that had passed over the edge of a flower-bed raised upon some natural rocks, something glanced rapidly before her eyes and fell upon her lap.

It was a paper wrapped round a stone, which

had been thrown from outside the boundary wall.

She rose and glanced round; then, at the thought of David, and fear of her father's anger against him, if he should observe the incident, sat down again to unwind and read the paper:—

‘I am here, and want urgently to see you. Can you accept from me the full sense of this necessity, and come to the Craig level without a moment's delay?’

‘Craig level’ was the name given to one of the wildest spots of the mountain, on account of the entrance there into an old and abandoned mine. It was one of those pits which lie so high within the mountain slopes that a ‘level’ gallery cut into one of them suffices for the winning of coal without a shaft.

Close by was a vast cinder-heap, that seemed as if it had bodily squatted down in a homogeneous mass upon and right across the lovely wild stream, which was therefore obliged to make way as well as it could round the black mound.

Nothing could be more complete than the

contrast between the hideous pile of man's making and the exquisite scenery around, including the wild stream, the high, waving, graceful bushes, and slender silvery birch trees along its banks, the undulations of the green surface as it stretched away upwards to the mountain peak, the lowly wild flowers, and the yellow gorse still in full bloom.

The wild stream itself, as if utterly unconscious of the outrage it suffered from, encircled the cinder heap as lovingly as if it were one of the fairest objects in creation; and became to it as a necklace, where shade and brightness alternated in rapid succession with the play of light on the moving water, like so many links in a diamond chain.

There David walked to and fro in a state of such absorbed, yet profound mental agitation, that at last he became conscious of his folly, and how it was unfitting him for the interview he had sought.

Making a strenuous effort at self-control, he endeavoured to stay the current that was carrying him away he hardly knew whither.

By the entrance into the mine was a little shed, which was just big enough for two people to sit, after painfully stooping to get in. He made his way in, and sat down.

Many and many a time had David sat there in boyhood waiting for some comrade, watching the while the bright little stream of water rushing out of the mine and pursuing its winding course through banks of flowering gorse.

Many a time, too, had he and another lad, tempted by repeated challenges from one to another, as to which would venture the farthest inside, gone in, and onward even to the distance of nearly a couple of miles: drawn along also by curiosity, and by the idea that existed among the youth of the neighbourhood, that valuable things might be found there.

David wondered as he looked back on these explorations. There had, then, been a time when he was less timid than he afterwards became. Did education make the change? The farther one saw, did one become the more incapable of using the insight obtained? He sighed profoundly as he owned to himself he could not tell.

He must go forth, to see if Nest were coming.

He did so, but his agitation seemed to increase, as he saw her garments fluttering in the wind afar off.

Thinking she might not have seen him, he went back to his seat, hoping to calm the increasing tremor of his nerves, and bitterly reproaching himself the while for his weakness.

There in the shed Nest found him, his fingers clammy with cold and perspiration, his face pale and distorted with passion, and covered with a kind of bead-like dew.

‘Come in,’ he said, before even he saw her.

Nest hesitated a moment, and looked as if doubting the propriety of his bidding, then went in, with a smile of sweet confidence, and was clasped in her lover’s arms.

‘Nest, dearest,’ he said after a pause, during which he seemed to be steadying his voice and manner, ‘thank you for this sweet confidence; believe me, it shall not be abused.

‘You know,’ he continued, ‘I went to London to report on the mine—and I may tell you now it was to report favourably. But first there was

delay. Men of business are mostly cautious, and fancy they often secure safety by virtue of being slow. My father was therefore left in suspense and I in misery, that I could not write to him.

‘At last, they declined. I then determined to go elsewhere, and see if I could not succeed better for him. I was fortunate ; a capitalist was ready. But last night the fearful news of the explosion reached us. The first feeling of my new agents was to have done with the mine at once, and forbid all further negotiations. But I induced them to listen, and to let me come down again to see what chances there yet remain for lending him a helping hand. Of course, he will have to make great sacrifices as to his own position, and perhaps even lose all right of property in it ; but I hope better things, and I am now going to see.’

‘And you will have to go down into the mine!’ ejaculated Nest, shrinking back in unutterable horror. ‘Go down to that fearful place?’

‘And if I were a soldier, and my commanding officer told me to march as one of a forlorn hope to storm a citadel, what would you have me do?’

David, as he said this, gazed into Nest's face as if his every hope of happiness here or hereafter were bound up in her reply.

Nest saw that look, and felt, as she supposed, all that was involved in it, so answered only with her tears for a minute or two; then she timidly crept to him, and pressed her heart against his breast, and murmured,

‘Yes, yes, you must go.’

‘Do you say so?’ David asked, as if in a kind of dreamy wonder.

‘Yes,’ sighed Nest, and placing her trembling hand in his.

She felt his trembling in reply; but it only deepened her sense of sympathy with him, for she thought his secret trouble meant sympathy with and for her.

Some instinct told David this, and made him shrink back from her, and presently cry out in words that seemed full of the most bitter anguish and self-reproach,

‘Nest, do not be deceived! you think me brave, heroic; that I am struggling simply to conceal

from you the suffering my fear for you inspires!
It is untrue, false! I am but a living lie!’

‘Oh, David, David, what mean you?’

‘That I am one of the rankest of cowards, even while pushed on by a cursed fate into the most cruel of positions, where I dare not show the most ordinary natural manifestation of what even strong men feel, lest I should break down at once and stand ashamed before a scornful and contemptuous world.’

‘Oh, David, David, dearest, this is not, cannot be true! Do you not see it cannot? Did you not lately go through all the most dangerous parts of the mine, sleep there, do your work so well that even my father has heard of you, and spoken words of admiration of the young fellow Israel had found to help him?’

‘Did he do that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Nest, you comfort me, even while I feel that the new alarm I have given you is itself a proof how ill things are with me here;’ and David put his hand to his breast.

‘David, I entreat you to listen to me. The pain you have to bear, I see and understand too well. And if I also must henceforth bear it, do you think so little of my love as to suppose I would evade it if I could? Oh, no! a thousand times no! For your sake, I do wish with all my heart and soul this thing were not so; but if you are thus marked out, selected from the herd of men for the accomplishment of this work, what can I think, feel, or say, but that just in proportion to the excess of pain and difficulty you individually find in it, is the value and glory of every conquest you achieve, and my pride and joy and exultation to stand by and wait and watch for the results?’

‘And you have no fear that—that the results may be——’

‘None, David, none.’

‘Nest,’ said David, after a long pause of passionate and wistful gazing into her eyes, ‘I will strive to tell you some other time all I have suffered in this way; for I feel that thus and thus alone, in communion with you, shall I entirely

master these unworthy emotions, if they ever are to be mastered.'

'Oh they will be—shall be!' exclaimed Nest, her face radiant with spiritual light and gladness that seemed to fill the dark little shed.

'And if so, you will be my deliverer in the future as you have already been in the past. Let us go forth.'

When David had helped Nest through the narrow and low aperture, he said to her, with quite a new serenity in his look,

'Pluck me a flower, Nest.'

She stooped, and did as she was bid, and he placed the flower carefully within his breast. Then he also stooped and plucked one to give to her, as he said :—

'When I meet you again—for my heart tells me we shall meet, that my prayers have already been answered—if I show you the flower you have now given me, this your precious gift, which now lies upon my heart, you will know it has not been dishonoured; but if I do not show it to you——'

‘What then?’ said Nest, softly and gravely.

‘Then demand it of me, that I may stand shamed before you and before God. Oh, Nest, pray for me, that I pass through the ordeal as I ought. Fortify me, strengthen me, my own darling! for I could not live to ask you to be my wife were my past gloomy fears of myself to be realised.’

It was Nest’s turn now to hesitate, to fear, to suggest doubt, as the thought occurred to her, she might never see him more.

‘David,’ she said, anxiously, ‘you will not needlessly rush into danger, for my sake you will not do that? Oh, David, I begin to wish you had not undertaken this work. If you doubt yourself, you do but after all what many of the noblest and bravest men would also do. The danger is not the kind of danger for spirits like yours to contend with. God shapes the man to the work. For rough labours, rough tools. Let others——’

‘Do *my* duty? No. Farewell! If with your love to think of as my recompense, an earthly father to be won, and a heavenly Father to watch

over me—and see how I try, in my humble human fashion, to repay Him for His unceasing bounty to me ;—if these things fail, it matters little what else may succeed. Nest, dearest, my own, one kiss, and then let me go.’

All Nest’s firmness, all her brightness, all her sweet confidence had died away, as David folded her in his arms, kissed her pale face and quivering lips passionately, many times, then seated her on the trunk of a tree, and not daring to trust himself with another word or look, hurried away.

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT RELIEF.

IF the enthusiasm we feel in moments of intense spiritual elevation would but last, what a world might we not make of this? What lives might we not lead?

So asked Nest of herself, as she found hour by hour all the glow of her meeting with David die out, and leave only darkness behind.

As she lay restless on her bed that night, she troubled herself ceaselessly with two questions :—

Had she done right to let her lover go to dangers so great, and to which he was so unaccustomed? What if his own instinct, that warned him so strongly away from such undertakings, had been the true one, after all, by which he ought to have been guided?

She pictured him to herself as already in the

mine ; and seemed to see into his very soul, and to watch the fearful struggle going on there—David, half paralysed by fear, yet maintaining a firm outward aspect ; longing to be back again upon the firm safe earth outside, yet irresistibly impelled to pursue the search begun, even after others might be willing to stop ; thinking of himself, of his want of faith in himself, and of his father's want of faith in him ; while perceiving in intensest anguish, rather than in any hopefulness of soul, how he might now *perhaps* scatter all such craven thoughts and ignoble fears like so many dead leaves to the winds, and feel they were indeed gone for ever !

She made herself so wretched by this kind of mental exercise, that she was at last constrained to get up and go to the window to look in the direction of the mine.

She knew very well she could not see it from that place, even in the daylight, but still she felt a kind of relief in letting her eyes rest in that direction. There was a slight mist, but the moon shone through the mist, and the light fell on a moving form in the garden below. She won-

dered, as all the family was supposed to be in bed ; she followed the figure with her glance, till she thought she recognised the clumsy gait of Jenkyn, the farm servant.

He drew nearer, and must, she thought, see her at the window ; but he made no sign of recognition till she raised the sash, to speak ; when his hurried gesture warned her against making any noise.

He came, and stood close under the window, bringing with him a short ladder that the gardener had been using to pick the ripened fruit. Up this he mounted till he could whisper to her as she leaned down :

‘Letter, Miss—please don’t tell master, or I’d lose my place.’

‘Don’t fear !’ she murmured in reply, taking the letter from him, and immediately closing her window, relighting her candle, and beginning to read.

‘Has he,’ she thought, while pausing, a moment in suspense, with the letter in her trembling fingers—‘Has he been thinking as I did, and resolved, wisely, not to tempt Providence?’

Oh, if he has, what a blessed relief ! But how much I shall have to do to satisfy him with himself ! Dear, dear David !’

This was the letter—

‘Dearest,—Perhaps if I could stand by you, my presence unsuspected, while you read this, I might, as I saw the relief [“relief!” murmured Nest, “how strange! the very word that was on my lips!” Then she again read the passage]—as I saw the relief my note gave, feel you knew me better than I knew myself, when you warned me to desist, and be anything but flattered by all that was involved in such a conclusion.

‘However, this is not what I have to say ; and I almost think I ought not to have written the preceding sentences, but have confined myself to the subject in hand.

‘Two circumstances, then, have occurred, which I think it but right you should at once know. The first is, that I find an agent—a scientific man, and a man of great practical knowledge—therefore of infinitely greater value than I could be, has come from the Penman Coed Colliery to take

the command of the men I proposed to lead ; and simultaneously I am recalled by an imperative order to London, which means, I fear, another break-down of the negotiation for capital.

‘ I shall, however, bate no jot of heart or hope in struggling for *him*, and you will doubtless hear from or see me before many days have passed.

‘ Till then, dearest, believe the best you can of your unhappy, perhaps unworthy lover.

From the little shed at the Craig Level.

‘ P.S.—It is intentionally I avoid names, not knowing into what hands accident might place this.’

‘ He is gone then ! ’ cried Nest, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, that yet were full of happy light. ‘ He is out of danger, and not discredited. Oh, thank Heaven ! This is indeed a great, a blessed relief ! ’

CHAPTER XIII

ISRAEL'S LIFE THEORY TESTED.

It was all the doctor could do to keep Israel to his couch for the days of rest he had consented to give; and it was more than he could do to keep him from attending to business during them.

Israel not only disobeyed and rebelled against the doctor, but managed to make him a partner in a conspiracy against himself.

‘Some letters must be written. There’s nobody but you, while my fingers are in this state. Sit down. We’ll have it over soon, and then I’ll be your model of patience for the whole neighbourhood afterwards.’

The doctor shrugged up his shoulders, but sat down, and played the part of amanuensis to his patient.

Wisely thinking it best to be himself the first to communicate the bad tidings, Israel had written immediately to Mr. Knight in London that letter which brought David so hurriedly down.

Now he made the doctor indite seven or eight urgent appeals to brother colliery owners living within some twenty miles round, all asking for farther help in his extremity. He wanted money for the injured people, who were poor, and which the doctor was to receive and distribute; he wanted superior men—agents, viewers, or managers, to come and see the mine and give counsel; he wanted a score or two of hardy, brave colliers, who were not, like his own, demoralised by the accident; and to whom he undertook to pay for the time extra wages, and allowances for special expenses. He explained that these men were wanted to take the place of the first band of explorers in case of need.

When this was done, Israel's feverish mind calmed; and he promised the doctor, who claimed an extra day's rest for his patient by way of reward for his double labours, that he would now be quiet for a little, on receiving the doctor's

assurance that Israel's own people were on the watch to do what ought to be done.

Never was rest more bitter and less wholesome to a man, in spite of the great need he had for it, than this which Israel experienced after the doctor left.

There he lay, and opposite to him the sleeping Deputy ; happily as yet unconscious of the new calamity—his wife's state, the consequences of which, indeed, Israel hardly dared to think of.

It is, however, one of the inevitable conditions of mining life that the shock experienced by the survivors from such calamities finds them prepared to bear while the immediate effect lasts, and prepared to forget the moment forgetfulness becomes possible.

As to Israel, he had perhaps never known before what such a shock meant. When mine-accidents happened he had been sorry, had rendered his due share of help, listened with patience to scorched men and to weeping women ; done, in fact, all he was expected to do, so long as he was not asked to give money—which he never did—or to display emotion which it was not in his

nature to feel—and so through long years had he been.

But now he felt as if all the terrible arrears of heartfelt sympathy, due to the many unfortunates he had known, were coming down upon him in one fell swoop, concentrated in the person of the Deputy.

At times he wished he had never seen him. Then he wished he had not so often stopped his mouth when he wanted to talk on matters deeply interesting to him, but that seemed, at the time, to Israel like feeding on husks and chaff. He would like now to have heard all Rees Thomas had wanted to say, so that he might weigh it, over and over, in these moments of forced leisure and gloom.

Then he tried to speculate on the motives of the man. Somehow, Israel, in all his past life, had never failed to satisfy himself about the characters and views of those with whom he was thrown into contact.

His plan had been simple :

First, he had laid down one broad, clear theory, that reduced all things to a kind of order, to

begin with. Every man's first object is to take care of himself. That was Israel's theory ; one which he applied with absolute rigidity to all conditions of men, and which he had never found to fail—so, at least, he had concluded.

But within this broad theory he recognised a great variety of practice. Some men cared for nothing but the theory, and would only find its limits when getting rather nigh to the criminal law ; some modified it so as to fit it to their own kindly dispositions ; some to harmonise it with the doctrines of Christianity, 'making,' as Israel used to say to himself, sardonically, 'an awful discord of the job ;' some again, would use, abuse, or manipulate the theory to suit their natural passions ;—and so there was always plenty to do for such natural, practical philosophers as Israel, while seeking to discover how this man's bent lay, or whither that woman's fancy tempted her, when he wanted to benefit by the knowledge.

But what, then, means this portentous phenomenon — this Rees Thomas — a man whose every action seems to run counter, as by the operation of an invincible law or profound in-

stinct, to Israel's life-long theory, and who is neither fool nor madman?

At least Israel thinks he is neither of these things ; nay, strange to say, almost hopes so, in spite of the fact that he is conscious the Deputy's theory and his own must be hopelessly irreconcilable.

The circumstance that most puzzles him is this —Why should he, Israel, care about the Deputy's theory? If he be neither fool nor madman, what then? What is that to Israel? Can't he eat, and drink, and sleep as well as ever? Has he not just as good reason to believe in his theory now that the Deputy rejects it, as if he had accepted it ; or as if he had never known any such strange heretic come to disturb the social state?

He feels mortified, and confused, as he recognises the fact that either he or his theory has changed.

Why does not the Deputy waken, sane, healthy, and strong, and narrate to him the story of his past life, his inner life, that Israel may see with his own mental eyes, touch with his own mental hands, the very fountain or source whence such a

life could spring up, grow, live, in a world like ours ; conforming to it in all sorts of ways, yet at issue with it in the deepest things, and not for its own sake, but for the world's? Bah ! It could not be true ! It was a case of eccentricity, and Israel would think no more of it. As the doctor had said, he needed rest : he would rest.

Alas for Israel ! There was to be no rest for him—except in action. Within a few minutes after making this promise to the doctor, and while he was noticing how much more regularly the Deputy breathed and how soft and noiselessly, he found himself suddenly face to face with the spectre he had known to be waiting for him, which he had avoided as long as he could without precisely fearing it, but the proportions and lineaments of which now appalled him with horror, as he prepared to confront it.

It was Ruin he beheld—ruin absolute—ruin from which there could be no escape !

The mine had existed and been worked so long without costly reparations only by aid of a constant series of tricky but skilful contrivances, to evade doing the things that needed to be done, in

order to make it reasonably safe as regarded life, and reasonably secure as regarded the capital involved. He knew that only too well.

He knew not yet the precise amount of the recent damage, but he felt assured that one result at least would follow now or very soon—that the mine must be shut up, or still larger capital obtained than he had yet asked for.

Where was he to get it, now that the security he had to offer—the mine—was so depreciated in actual value; and that again so greatly injured in commercial estimation by the accident? As Mr. Knight's employers had done, so would all other proposing capitalists do—leave him in the lurch at last.

He wondered many times, 'till indeed he was vexed with himself for so senseless a piece of self-annoyance, what the slumbering Deputy opposite him would think, if he could but know of one incident after another that now rose up in Israel's too faithful memory to trouble him; incidents where he had scented danger with unerring skill, but had concealed it from every living breast, and immediately set to work to put up obstacles

of various kinds to prevent any of the colliers touching upon these peril-spots, but not attempting any but the most trivial efforts to remove the causes of danger.

He sickened at the contemplation, and in sheer necessity of relief could not help shouting to the Deputy,

‘ Can’t you talk a bit? Do for heaven’s sake try, or I shall go mad ! ’

The Deputy rose at the summons into a sitting posture, looking, Israel thought, more like a man who had actually risen from the dead, than even from the extremest danger of death.

And it was evident, from the wandering look of his eyes, and the painful efforts that became gradually apparent in his face, that he felt for the time as one divided from all past experience by an impassable gulf.

He gazed on Israel without recognition. He stared up at the roof, and sideways at the walls of his chamber ; looked down upon his own form ; touched with the fingers of one hand the fingers of the other, as if vainly striving to know whether they were indeed his own ; then helplessly closed

his eyes, and leaned back against the heaped-up pillows behind him, and so remained for some minutes, during which Israel did not think it well to speak to him, or make any kind of effort to attract his attention, watching him, however, the while with the deepest interest.

The doctor now came in, but before he could speak to the Deputy, who looked, he thought, better, an incident occurred which turned the thoughts of all present in a new direction. Suddenly the air was rent by another tremendous explosion.

The glass in Israel's windows was broken by the concussion. He needed no one to tell him what had happened. His continual misgivings had been only too fearfully realised. The explorers, who had gone down on their chivalrous mission to re-open the mine, prepare for a renewal of the labours of the men suddenly thrown out of work, succour the wounded, if any yet lived, and bring away the dead for decent burial, these men—part of the noble army of martyrs of science, were now engulfed in that same fearful whirlpool of fire that Israel had so lately passed through.

Israel's resolution as to what he would do was formed more quickly than he could have made it known to any bystander, though for the moment he said nothing. The doctor at once offered to go and see what had happened, and hurry back with the news: an offer that was gratefully accepted.

Still the doctor delayed—as if dubious of Israel's intentions, while desiring to keep his doubts to himself.

But Israel looked as if no new calamities could hurt him. He seemed neither stunned nor overwhelmed, so far as his voice or manner or the few words he spake revealed what was passing within; but it soon became evident to Dr. Jolliffe that the unnatural self-control his presence imposed, or helped to impose, could do no good and might do much harm; so with another kindly pressure of Israel's unsympathetic hand, he took his leave.

And then Israel rose at once from his couch, and carefully and thoughtfully dressed himself. He searched for and put away in the pockets of his thick overcoat various articles likely to be

useful to himself or others—among them a flask of brandy and a quantity of biscuits—slung his safety-lamp about him, cast one look at the Deputy, and then went forth, avoiding the notice of his old housekeeper, who was half crazed to be told by a neighbour gossip a few minutes later how glad she was to see the master go forth again.

CHAPTER XIV.

THICK-COMING FANCIES.

ISRAEL before his departure took a last look of the sleeping Deputy ; and as he gazed on his face—of which he could only see the scarred side, and above it the calm, pale brow—he seemed drawn even at that critical moment, as by some kind of secret fascination, to recall one particular incident ; in spite of the superstitious fear that Rees Thomas who was a perpetual wonder to him, might have a latent power to imbibe the knowledge of it, thus set afloat in the spiritual atmosphere that hung about him.

When miners believe themselves to be approaching old and abandoned workings, which frequently become vast reservoirs of water, the law of the position is to keep on boring by the aid of a boring rod, not only considerably in

advance and directly in front of the workings, but also in diagonal lines right and left. This is done not simply to enlarge the area of rock or coal thus submitted to experiment, but in order to guard against a very fruitful source of danger, that arising from the fact that the space along any extended front may be divided into different stalls, that is, places where coal has been worked out, while pillars of coal were left standing on each side as walls. A stall or level may be safely driven in one direction, while in another there may be old and abandoned stalls, full of water.

‘Scarcely in three out of every ten cases,’ says an experienced agent, ‘is this thoroughly carried out.’ Welsh colliers, it seems, get sixpence a yard for boring. The work is chiefly done by night, so as to avoid interfering with the winning of coal, and the Overmen often take the men’s word as to the distances they have driven the boring rod.

Now as eight yards of diagonal boring are but four of actual advance, and may be fraudulently lessened to two or even one, it is easy to see what a fruitful source of danger lies in this imperfect boring

Israel had been dealing with just such a danger within the last few months, when pecuniary difficulties had become pressing, and coal must be got at all hazards. As he advanced he had bored to the right and left, and straight onward, in the direction he wanted his hewers to go, and no signs of these hidden reservoirs of water had appeared.

But one day, Israel, who was always hovering about the boring apparatus, and who was sure to be there when the borers were away near the engine to get a hot potato with their dinners—one day, at the noontide hour, Israel saw to his alarm signs in the left hand diagonal boring that caused him, without recalling the men from their refreshment, instantly to work the borer himself; and to go on as if almost madly desirous to go as far as possible before he might be interrupted by any inquisitive eyes.

He was but too successful. Easier every instant, as he did not fail to note, became the work of penetration; until at last he stopped, his face dripping with perspiration, and he stood still as if paralysed with fear.

But that was no mood for Israel long to remain in. He remembered his maps, and on remembering, was certain now, with this experience of his with the boring rod, that he was about to tap a sort of hidden under-ground lake, that would, once let loose, soon make a mere watery wreck of the whole mine.

But he also felt sure that by slightly inclining to the right his future working level, he could avoid danger for many months, and yet keep in close proximity to this watery abyss—the shape of which he knew from his maps; and so resolved not to stay all workings whatsoever in the neighbourhood, as he knew he ought to have done, but simply to close up the way on the left.

With characteristic strength of will and promptitude of purpose, he managed unaided to break off the stem of the boring-rod and to leave the greater portion within the rock; thanking his stars that no rush of water had overtaken him, and set to nought all his plans for concealment.

‘I think, Keys,’ he said, as one of the borers returned from his dinner, the smell of tobacco strong about him, and suggesting for once with

impunity a breach of the peremptory rule against smoking, 'I think we'll stop this. We're wasting time here; and might as well bore into the sides of Plynlymmon. I've had an accident—trying to withdraw the rod—but it's no matter—it was pretty well worn out. So leave this, and turn the place into a gob—for your rubbish.'

Thus Israel not only silenced possible suspicion, but prepared a buttress that would daily grow stronger, against any pressure such as water in great body often exercises with fatal effect.

Now, as he recalled the incident, his own conduct—thought nothing of at the time—seemed to startle him alike as regarded the past, present, and future.

The injury done by the explosion might not in itself be likely to set free these imprisoned waters; but there were so many possibilities contingent upon the explosion—as Falls—men imprisoned, and having to cut their way through the most unexpected places—and so on, that his heart was heavy with misgivings as he went towards the mine.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CALL OF THE FORLORN HOPE.

THE vast crowd of people that had been collected around the pit-mouth, in consequence of the second and more terrible explosion, opened, and became suddenly silent as if moved by one common impulse, when Israel appeared, and strode right onwards to the scene of all his anxieties.

He spoke to no one, looked in no one's face, but strode on, the very incarnation of silent concentrated strength, and clearness of will and purpose, till he was able to survey for the first time all that had happened outside the mine since the night of his fatal visit.

However he might be secretly affected by the ruinous condition of things, no word or look revealed the slightest touch of emotion.

‘Where is Morgan?’ he demanded aloud. This

was the night-Deputy mentioned in a former chapter—who had refused to go down in search of Israel, when Rees Thomas had undertaken the task.

Morgan came forward.

‘Fit up with boards and canvas a place to receive as they come up the people who may be hurt. Let every necessary be provided. Send for every available doctor. Lose not a moment. Employ whatever hands you need.’

He then began to examine into the means of going down, and found a small sheave which would enable them soon to suspend a tub to facilitate the descent. This was got ready.

A fearful task was before him. The very mouth of the pit had, in parts, lost its shape through the fall of masses of earth and rock, which doubtless blocked up the shaft at the bottom, and perhaps cut off from all access to the air those who were in the mine, and some of whom might but for that circumstance be found alive.

He turned to the vast circle of faces about him, and seemed as if he would speak to them. They

were only too conscious of what he would say, and many among the nearest began to draw back and widen out, so that no man should be in danger of being addressed individually.

In justice to the colliers, however, it must be remembered how bad was the reputation of the mine ; how long-looked for the catastrophe that had now befallen ; how much reason there was to fear that explosion after explosion would yet take place, and therefore how suicidal would be any further immediate attempt to go down.

Israel divined their thoughts, and changed his purpose ; and seeing that his own people had to some extent gathered round him in order to drive back those portions of the crowd which were little likely to be useful, he began to call out one name after another ; and wherever he heard the reply, ‘ Here ! ’ he bade that man come to him.

When he had thus called perhaps twenty persons, and obtained not more than seven answers, he stopped, surveyed the little band earnestly, yet as if no shadow of doubt about them rested on his mind, and then said—

‘I see, lads, you know for what you are wanted and that if any men in the world can do what now ought to be done, and if possible shall be done, you are the lads to do it. Fear not for your wives and little ones. There are kind hearts in the world, I find, and they will be cared for in any case. Are you ready?’

‘Well, master,’ said a voice in reply, ‘one collier is bound to do another a good turn; I vally my life as little as most folk; but it seems to me there’s been sad waste of life already, while you’ve been away.’

‘Ay? Then the more need to look sharp after it now. Lads, I ask no man to do what I shall not share in. I was, as you know, stricken down, and it’s likely I haven’t the strength to lift a man if I get the chance to save his life. But I will go first—direct, and care for you. Come!’

Again the same man was about to speak, but Israel contemptuously bade him walk away and join the crowd and talk to *them*. Then to the others he said,—

‘My lads, you do not need incitement; that is

impossible. Think, who were these men? Brothers—who came here for us, having no earthly object to serve, no gain to get, no motive but to help us.'

Still the men paused, though no one spake, and the man who had spoken stood still where he was before, looking sullenly down.

'What if,' continued Israel, and his voice began to thunder forth, 'you are killing with each minute's delay a man? What if they are cheering each other down there below with the thought of the good fellows above ground?'

The men looked uncomfortably wretched, unwilling to decide what to do.

'All right, lads, I see I made a mistake about you. But you shan't say you made any mistake about me. Farewell! One man at least shall do his duty this day.'

He went towards the tub, which was hanging ready; but at once there arose a cry—then a cheer—then a rousing hurrah, first from the little band—the selected forlorn hope—then from the multitudes beyond, who, unable to hear, were not the less quick to understand and appreciate.

Tools were now hastily gathered together, with which to penetrate the rubbish at the bottom of the shaft; and before this was thoroughly accomplished one volunteer after another came forward from among the crowd, to share in the desperate enterprise. And Israel could not but notice that in every case they were men whose names he had called out; and who had, after mastering their first fear, been ashamed of their silence, and at last been moved to generous emulation by the thought that he had intentionally selected them.

Israel thus found himself master of two sets of men—one to go down first, work as colliers only can work, for a short time till exhausted; then be replaced by the other set, and so the two sets to work alternately without one moment's pause in the labour.

Melancholy, anxious, terrible hours were these that now succeeded before an opening could be made through the débris at the bottom of the shaft.

The hours became days, and still there was no communication.

It was not until the latter part of the fourth

day from the explosion that the path was sufficiently clear for persons to go in and out.

And then it was found impossible to go many yards on account of the heat and the suffocating air. They learned, however, from their first attempt to advance, that the levels did not seem much worse than they had been after the first explosion.

The ventilating machinery was set to work, and great indeed was the feeling of relief to find it could work, and that in a little time the levels might be entered and the worst be known as to the fate of the party of explorers.

Not once had Israel been to the surface during the whole of this period. While the other men went regularly up and down, and derived great comfort and confidence from the fresh air, the light, and the meeting with relatives and friends, he made himself a resting-place, first in the débris, then at the bottom of the shaft, so as to get air; and there he ate and drank, there slept—when he did sleep—having a man at his side, with orders to wake him if there appeared the slightest

necessity, and in any case not to let him sleep above three hours at any one time.

‘When a man’s body is weakened by knocking about, and by burns, and ailments of all sorts, one can’t do just what one would,’ he said, with a smile, to a new shift of men who found him asleep.

He was deceived if he fancied they needed such a remark. They were feeling a little proud of themselves, but infinitely prouder of him who had made them know themselves.

Israel’s conduct was indeed as a revelation to them. They had known him hitherto only as a hard taskmaster, and a most unscrupulous speculator with their lives in his efforts to carry on the mine profitably, without regard to its safety.

There was something to these simple men almost godlike in the stern silence of their leader; in his utter abnegation of self, while possibly he might know he was irretrievably ruined; in the unerring sagacity of his insight as to the measures necessary for properly dealing with the mine and the people in it, as they began to advance into

the interior ; in the infinite resources he brought to bear practically on the conquest of difficulties at each step of the way ; and in the extraordinary efforts he made when he got to the victims of the explosion, to remove each as swiftly as possible to the bottom of the shaft, that there they might see who lived and who had died.

Soon, therefore, the crowd at the top began to see the bucket come up at frequent intervals ; sometimes with a living but senseless freight, accompanied by one of Israel's forlorn hope ; but generally with those who had drawn their last breath in the depths below.

To the interest of all who looked on, Israel himself came up with one of the victims—a living one. This man had strayed to a part remote from the explosion, which gave him a great shock, but did not directly injure him. But as he falteringly retraced his steps, a mass of coal and timber fell upon him, and prostrated without killing him. It appeared strange to those around Israel that he should repeatedly ask about this man, whom he seemed to be sure was in the mine. It was long before any tidings of him could be obtained, but

at last Israel having got near, and being then listening, as was his wont, at every moment of pause and advance to new ground, heard a cry, and recognised it.

He found the poor fellow so overwhelmed that he could not move an inch, but his chest was free to breathe, and his legs, though bent together into a most unnatural and painful posture, were not broken.

All this Israel learned by brief but pertinent questions, and that probably, if the man could be extricated, he would live.

He cried for drink, and that was supplied in the form of weak brandy-and-water, by Israel, after a good deal of difficulty to get the tube to the man's lips. Then, as Israel listened once more to hear what he said, he distinguished the fervent ejaculations of—

‘God be praised! Christ have mercy on me! Lord have mercy on me!’

‘I knew my man,’ said Israel to himself; yes, he knew him as a friend or disciple of the Deputy, Rees Thomas; and he evidently felt more proud of the chance of this one conquest over Death.

and his terrors than of all the other lives likely to be saved from the general wreck.

He worked with the men at the cutting of the timber, and in the hewing of the coal, and in the shovelling away the rubbish made, till the man was free and essayed to stand. He could not do that, but he found he was whole in limb; and was so transported with gratitude, while so enfeebled in body and mind, that he seemed about to kneel to Israel, who saw the movement, and remembering, unpleasantly, a somewhat similar incident, was shocked by it, till stopped with the words—

‘You mistake. I am a Christian, and kneel to no one but God.’

The man then asked Israel to join him one moment in prayer.

‘I will wait for you while you pray,’ said Israel.

‘And I may pray for you?’

‘Yes. Your prayers cannot harm me.’

Israel regretted his consent to stay, since it involved, he found, listening to things said about himself, in unquestionable fervency of heart and soul, that made his cheek burn, and his eyes drop

to the earth, as if they could not at that moment look up.

This was the man that Israel would not entrust to the bucket under any other charge than his own.

At the pit-mouth a great surprise awaited him. The very first person he saw was the Deputy himself, Rees Thomas, standing there pale as death; but looking so stern and strange, that his mother-in-law who was with him did nothing but bewail him to his very face; but not even Death could be more resolved than he.

He stepped forward, recognised the man brought up, and could not for the moment restrain his emotion as he said, and felt sorry for the moment it was said—

‘For my sake, Israel?’

Israel would have lied then if he ever did lie. He could not be demonstrative—that was against his whole nature. Driven to reply something, he said, in the old harsh voice—

‘He’s safe! Isn’t that enough for you?’

The man was taken away by friends, and Israel and the Deputy stood face to face.

‘Did I not tell thee,’ began the Deputy, after gazing long and earnestly in Israel’s face, and while tears were gathering in his eyes—‘Did I not tell thee what thou wert? Israel Mort, would I could also tell thee how I honour thee—how proud I shall be to become again thy servant, when thou hast become, as thou wilt, His servant. It is not for me to sing the praises of men, but of God. The best of us, what are we but worms in his sight? Yet if thou wert to die this hour, unconverted as thou art in forms of belief, something tells me that on Christ’s bosom there would lie no dearer soul than thine.’

‘Rees Thomas, what I am, I am. What I may be, I know not myself, therefore cannot own that you are likely to know. Suffice it to say, this language is inexpressibly painful to me, and that I will have no more of it. Dost thou hear?’

‘Ay,’ said the Deputy with a strange smile on his face.

‘Now then, to other matters. What brings you here? You cannot yet be fit to come out.’

‘Am I not? We’ll see that presently. Israel,

I have been to seek my wife. She has gone to some relative, they tell me. Surely they would not deceive me. Does she live? Did she enquire after me while I lay in my long stupor? I am racked with anxiety and wonder about her and our little boy.'

'I heard your wife singing when last I was near her,' said Israel while meditating as to how he should act.

'Singing?'

'Ay, a verse of a hymn; and since it moved me, you may judge how she sang.'

'And she is well? And the child?'

'Ay,' said Israel, 'and cared for, till you are at liberty to seek them and bring them home. I thought it best to have you at my house with me, when we were both stricken down together; and I left all the rest to the doctor, who has seen to your wife's comforts, depend on that.'

The Deputy seemed as if his heart misgave him on this point, and yet that what he had come to do did not admit of any diversion of thought or energy. So presently he said,

'Now, Israel, I hope to lighten thy task. Many

persons are below—some possibly that have life in them. Shall we go down together, or shall we take it turn by turn, just as thou hast so wisely arranged for the men ? ’

‘ You shall do neither. Go home and get yourself strong, and then come to me. ’

‘ Israel, dost thou know what thou meanest when thou sayest to a man, “ I have made up my mind ? ” That, then, is my meaning, when I say the same to thee. So let us go down together. ’

‘ That would be folly. A leader there must be. If I fall, you remain ; that is for me a great comfort. ’

‘ You speak well, and have judged us both out of your own mouth. It is my turn now to go down. I claim my right. ’

‘ I cannot—will not consent. ’

‘ Israel, are you not too ambitious of glory ? Can you not let your poor brother have some little hope of his name being remembered after he has passed away ? However, be it as you will ; only, in any case, I go down. ’

‘ You are as ever the most obstinate of men, ’ said Israel, ‘ and I must yield, I suppose. But I

warn you, that if I go home, and once touch my bed, I doubt whether even another explosion fearful as the last would waken me. I sleep now as I stand, as I walk—almost as I talk.’

‘Thank God that I have come then to your relief in so timely a manner! Ah, friend, if only you could see, as I do, His hand in all this!’

‘Rees Thomas, a word with you. These calamities may affect me severely, perhaps fatally; if so, I shall have one regret, that I ought, I think, to speak of.’

‘What is that?’

‘That I did not let you have your own way with regard to the prayers in the mine at the beginning of the day’s work, when you first asked me, so many years ago.’

‘But you did consent at last, and will abide by it in the future?’

‘Ay, if there be any future.’

‘Trust me—trust Him—there will be.’

‘And then we will talk about your position.’

‘My position! Trouble not about that. Make me your friend, let me do in God’s cause, and for my Saviour, what I feel called to do, and you

will accomplish one of the greatest of human achievements—you will have made not one, but two, fellow-creatures permanently happy, myself and my wife. Farewell, till we meet again.'

'Yes, till we meet again,' echoed Israel in a low sad voice, that seemed to hang on the words it was uttering, as if every moment new hopes and fears sprang into existence.

The Deputy put out his hand to shorten the delay that Israel, so unlike his ordinary self, seemed to want to make.

Israel took it, half unconsciously, and held it, while his face was more moved than the Deputy had ever before seen it.

Presently he passed his hand across his face, as if conscious of the display, and desirous to brush away from it all traces, and then spake:—

'Friend Rees Thomas, it is somewhat late to begin to suspect, as I do now, that I have lived all my life not in one kind of mine, as I fancied, but in two kinds; and that by far the darkest, deepest, most dangerous mine is not that you are about again to penetrate, but that other one—of the spirit—which you have penetrated; but only

for the present to enhance, by the very gleams you persist in shedding there, my own sense of the deep gloom in which you leave me. Farewell.'

'Once more, Israel, I say to you, wait—hope—trust—and all shall be well. You are fighting the noblest of fights, and it is my privilege to stand by and see you conquer.'

'Conquer! Conquer what? Myself? I am not worth any such pother. Farewell.'

There was in Israel's secret soul all through this conversation an intense desire to unburden himself of a perilous weight—his knowledge (already spoken of) of a still new and ever-pressing danger, created by his own reckless selfishness—the danger of inundation. It was his constant thought,—How long can the waters be kept out after the near approach we have made to them?

He knew he ought to tell this to the Deputy; not so much for the increased but unknown hazard to his own life—for on that point the men were at one, in their courage and their faith that

it was their duty to run all conceivable risks for the salvation of life—but because the Deputy might have it in his power to guard against the consequences of so terrific a danger.

Why, then, did he not tell him?

Because he literally felt ashamed; and because he feared that the knowledge of such a crime—as the Deputy would be sure to think this to be—would lose Israel the one man in the whole world whom he now most valued, most thought of, and whose counsel he most thirsted after. The good opinion of Rees Thomas had suddenly become a sort of necessity of life.

So he let him go—ignorant of that dread secret.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATE OF THE EXPLORERS.

WHEN the Deputy relieved Israel from the arduous task of seeking for all those of the generous band of explorers who remained in the mine, he found himself at once faced by a great difficulty ; he did not know how many persons had to be sought for.

The men originally in the mine on the night of Israel's and his Overman's tragical visit were thirteen or fourteen in number. These had nearly all been accounted for. The bulk of them had been found dead, and the remainder had been carried home, two only excepted. But the explorers who had accomplished this work, acting under the guidance of an agent from the Penman Coed colliery would not, as Israel heard with deep emotion, desist while even two remained. And thus they became victims to the second explosion.

The number of the explorers was known to have been twenty-seven; of these fourteen only had been found and taken to the surface by Israel: consequently nearly half the original number remained to be accounted for. Two more were discovered by the Deputy, lying dead in strange out-of-the-way places, where they had been blown by the explosion; but no efforts of exploration revealed to him the whereabouts or the fate of the remaining eleven. The chivalrous leader was unhappily among the dead.

But as time passed, and the knowledge of the Deputy's doings spread through the neighbourhood, fresh recruits offered; and he was speedily at the head of twenty hard-headed, strong-handed, energetic men, whom danger had long since ceased to appal.

And as these became exhausted with the severity of the labour imposed upon them, as much by their own earnest souls as by the Deputy's word of command, others were always ready to take their place.

Level after level was thus regained from the chaos into which falling masses of rock, coal,

woodwork, &c., had reduced them, and every hour saw increased means of communication open.

But still no traces of the eleven missing explorers!

It now grew clear to the Deputy that these men must have separated before the explosion from their fellows, probably to pursue their enquiries in a different direction.

It was also clear to him that whatever interposed between him and them could only be rubbish and falling matter, recently deposited, however much accident might have contributed to conceal the precise place.

Dividing his twenty men into four batches of five each, he sent them in as many different directions. He had previously gone before to indicate whatever spots seemed most hopeful, and there they set to work to bore into, or to make a sort of man-hole or passage through, according to circumstances.

Several hours thus passed, without any kind of reward for the labour bestowed, or for the suffering with which it was accompanied—through the heat, the foul air, and the incessant injuries

received from the crumbling, dangerous state of everything the labourers touched.

Dangerous indeed was the position—far more so than any but the Deputy knew, and he as yet knew it only indistinctly.

In more than one place where they had been boring, water oozed slowly through, and caused the Deputy to order the men to stop.

Still, he thought nothing of the incident till, in his constant passing to and fro to stimulate, advise, and direct his little groups of men, he found the water about his feet in places usually dry.

When he again came to the same place he found the water higher than before, and now he felt it a duty to own there was real, pressing, and very great danger.

Still, if only he could find these men speedily, and get them away, there would be no more lives lost. And then they could go to work pumping from outside, and so keep things tolerably safe till larger measures could be adopted, if found necessary.

But the Deputy was not the only one who fore-

saw this new terror. The men became discouraged, and some began to grumble. 'I don't believe as twenty-seven men ever came down!' said one. While another urged, 'In the confusion at the pit-mouth they hadn't correctly reckoned all that Mr. Mort had got out.' And, in fine, the belief became general that they were risking life for nobody's benefit, and that it was natural they should think it time to stop.

But the Deputy knew that if there was one man in the world to be trusted to take count correctly, even under such circumstances, it was Israel; and he assured them they had only to go on, and great indeed would be their reward and satisfaction.

And so it proved. At one place where they had been working in the sort of hopeless spirit of which we have spoken, it was not long before they stopped; and, the Deputy being elsewhere, began seriously to comment on his evident anxieties about something he didn't talk of; and to take counsel with each other whether they would not at once march off in a body, and abide no more words with their unreasonable leader.

But while, at the first mention of this project by one of their number, they stood gazing irresolutely in each other's faces, and in a silence that no one was willing to break, the stillness was broken by a dull yet distinct sound that in an instant electrified every face, and freshly nerved every hand and heart.

‘There they are! There they are!’ was the general cry.

One instantly ran to fetch the Deputy, who, when he came, looking flushed and agitated, ordered all to be silent and motionless while he knocked with a pick, and with the peculiar and timed blows only known to the collier, of one—two; one—two—three—against the side in the direction of the sound, as indicated to him, and then listened.

‘Thank God!’ he murmured. ‘They are there—and will soon be here. The sound is so clear that there cannot be much betwixt us. But lose not a moment! This time is ours. Who shall say how long it may remain so? Quick! and we may all be out of the mine in half an hour!’

The influence of that thought, added to all that

had gone before, put such new heart into the men's toil, that in a very few minutes they heard a voice, and all stopped to listen.

It seemed to them as if the voice spoke as from the grave :—

‘ We’ve been knocking with our boot-heels for the last three days or more.’

‘ How many ? ’

‘ Eleven ! ’

‘ All living ? ’ asked the Deputy.

‘ We’re all dying,’ grumbled the voice.

‘ All right ! ’ shouted the Deputy cheerily back, and then would not allow another moment to be lost for pauses of any kind.

He seemed to watch with extreme jealousy any delay between the strokes of the picks, which fell faster and stronger, and yet he could not help pleading in a broken, passionate voice—

‘ Faster ! Harder ! Lest we be all overtaken together ! ’

Had they known what he knew, they would probably have thrown down their tools, and fled, and have smitten him to the earth had he attempted to stay them.

Was he doing right to conceal the truth from them?

That doubt was the sting in his soul—not fear of any kind for himself.

He could not resolve it to his own peace and satisfaction. There were the lives within the barrier to balance against the lives without it. What endangered the one class might save the other. There was the assured certainty that a few minutes more would set them all free together to escape!

Ay, but would there be those few moments accorded?

Yes, if no sudden rush of the waters broke in upon them—he was sure of that. The silent, almost imperceptible, increase in the parts whence the Deputy had just come might go on for hours without endangering them; but the fact of the increase of water was itself so alarming that he knew not what he ought to do.

Ah, what relief! With what transports of joy and pious thankfulness does the Deputy note the sudden stop of the picks, the gathering at a point, the rending away with hands of pieces of half-

removed rubbish sticking out from the side of the small opening, and then the drawing forth of a man ; and before there is time to welcome him, as he rose staggeringly to his feet, another, and another, till the whole eleven are forth.

And wonder of wonders—the last of the eleven is David, Israel's son ; who knew the Deputy instantly, and could not resist a kind of passionate cry to him, which made him known to Rees Thomas before his words had time to convey the truth.

With the miner's usual thoughtlessness in such matters, David's companions had taken down no food with them beyond that which sufficed for nourishment during any accidental delay that might occur to keep them for a few hours longer than they intended in the mine. But David, who had joined them as a volunteer after their descent, and who had filled his pockets with sandwiches and biscuits enough to have kept him quite free from hunger during the whole four days, shared all he had with the others ; and made one or two men who had been also provident follow his example, though very reluctantly. Thus it was

ten more of the explorers were saved, besides David—one only having succumbed.

How David came to be there may be explained in few words. After he had sent off his note to Nest, he found himself so thoroughly wretched—so profoundly convinced he had been using circumstances to evade legitimate duties—so moved once more at his father's thought of him—if he should know how he had fallen back at the critical moment—or if he should know on the other hand that he had gone down, and bravely acquitted himself—all these thoughts combining, made him suddenly resolve to descend at once into the mine; and he did so without allowing himself a single moment's pause for further reflection.

The two men could not at first speak to each other as they met. It seemed no place or time for converse such as their hearts needed. A mutual grasp of the hand, that made each feel how dear the other was to him, how full of intensest gratification the meeting, and that was all for the moment. But as the other explorers moved on, and left them a little behind, the Deputy's arms opened, there was a silent embrace,

and then a few murmured words from him to David:—

‘Oh, I did not know this! did not suspect this. I recognise a higher power in this! God must have moved me to risk so much for all these brave men here, intending to reward me by giving thee! Eternal blessings to His name! But come—hurry! David, the waters are coming in upon us. But we shall escape! I shall take you to your father, and make known to him who and what you are!’

When they turned to look round, they were alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FOUNTAINS OF THE DEEP BREAK UP.

As the two men had their danger thus unexpectedly brought home to them, they hurried after their companions.

They had not gone far before one of these men came running back, crying excitedly :

‘The way is stopped! I have been up to my neck in water, and couldn’t get any farther.’

‘Try other ways, then!’ shouted the Deputy. ‘Take you the one to the right, we will go to the left; come back if you fail, to see if we have succeeded.’

Away they all went, but all came back, and not the three only, but others—one, two, three at a time, and all with the same story. When they reached a certain lower point they found the water so deep as to be impassable.

Horror stricken they gaze upon each other in the faintly-illumined darkness, their faces dripping with sweat and blackened with grime.

‘Let us pray,’ cries the Deputy.

‘No time for that now,’ responds a coarse, hard voice. ‘Can’t you hear?’

In a sense he was right; for as they listened they did hear a fearful rush and tumult and surging of water through the mine: the fountains of the deep had broken up!

It was David’s turn now to speak:—His voice trembled with emotion, but the listeners were probably too much pre-occupied to notice the fact.

‘We can’t get out, that is certain; but we may live within till succoured, if we can only reach a high level. I saw such a place. Who knows where it is, and how to get at it?’

‘My child, you have saved us!’ cried the Deputy, holding up his lamp, and gazing in David’s face as if he found new light and life in the remembrance of the wisdom to be found in babes and sucklings. To him David was still anything and everything but one of the prosaic

mass of mankind from whom youth and its sentiment and poetry have passed never to return.

He led the way along one of the levels that had been ineffectually tried for escape, but on reaching a certain point, instead of turning to the left, which led downwards, and then on towards the shaft, he turned to the right, and went up a somewhat steep incline.

Cries of horror broke from behind him.

‘Run! Make way!’

He turned, and saw—dimly—forms rushing up, huddled together, overthrowing each other, but swiftly rising again; and lo! in another minute, they were all enveloped by the waters of the inundation.

The Deputy had since meeting David lost to some extent the singleness of heart and purpose that previously characterised him. It was not that he was not as willing as ever to yield up his life for the safety of his companions, as full of abounding love for them, which he desired to show by teaching them of that other and Divine love which he believed had not deserted them even in this fearful strait; no, but he was

physically weak and ill, and felt he could no longer think of those things only, but also, and chiefly of David—of the saving him—of the taking him to Israel ; an idea that was entrancing.

Every step, therefore, he moved in the mine he moved in the closest possible proximity to David. He could not bear to lose sight of him even for an instant ; and thus, when the dreadful rush of the inundating waters overwhelmed them, he found himself suddenly drawn up upon a slippery shelf of rock by friendly hands, and the next instant was able, from his point of vantage, to save David.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MINER'S ARARAT.

THE shelter thus found by the Deputy and David and by the friendly collier who had preceded them, and in effect guided both to it, was a natural ledge in the rock ; which consisted of soft shale, the surface sloping downward and very slippery ; so that it was difficult for the many men who were struggling in the water to climb up to it. But by mutual help, and by digging—some with their hands, some with the hooks of their lamps—they were all got up, all at least who lived to struggle ; for as yet it was impossible to say how many had been carried away by the first great rush of the waters, or how many more had dropped helplessly and been lost during the fierce contest for the only place of security offered.

But at last they all sat on this narrow ledge, which extended for a short distance on both sides of the incline ; a woful company ; listening to the fall of the drops which trickled down from their saturated clothes into the water. They were as silent as if they waited not for death to make them so ; except once, when the silence was broken by a solitary moan from a youth, which at once called forth a loud symphony of sighs and groans, and prayers and exclamations that welled forth in irrepressible anguish from the colliers' breasts.

The waters came up to their feet, and so confined and pressed upon the air, that they felt as men feel who go down for the first time in a diving bell. All sorts of noises were in their ears. And when anyone tried to speak to his neighbour, he found he had no longer free use of the organs of speech.

A great thirst seized some of the men, and they leaned down—others holding them the while—to scoop up the water in their hands, and drink. But nothing, surely, more horrible ever entered into the soul of man, than the sickening disgust

they experienced at the smell of that water, which had been so long stagnant in the abandoned pit.

To add to the misery of their situation, as time passed the lamps began to go out, one after another, for want of oil, till at last they were in total darkness.

How was it the Deputy was silent—now when the captives needed the spiritual comfort he could so well give?

The very first moment that he had known all the men were safely raised to that shelf of rock which seemed to him a kind of new Ararat, he had begun to lift his voice in terms of warning against sleep. They must not do that, he said. He conjured them to listen to him. Sleep would be as dangerous to them as to Arctic voyagers, overtaken in some desperate land-journey—where the very words sleep and death became synonymous.

And as he spoke his voice grew more and more feeble, and at last ceased altogether.

And David knew he was asleep.

But David believed the Deputy was mistaken, and that under their present condition sleep would

be more beneficial than dangerous, so did not attempt to disturb his friend.

Yes, he had fallen asleep. His little strength was utterly exhausted. As we have seen, he was but an invalid newly come from the chamber of sickness ; and the state of the air and the heat probably helped to deprive him of all power to do what his heart yearned to accomplish.

But Nature is as wise as she is kind. The Deputy could do little now. The calamity was too great for words, however sweet, precious, and holy, to assuage it. Time must be given and sleep.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FIRST NIGHT OF CAPTIVITY.

A FEARFUL night followed for those who did not sleep. There was an old man who was so restless that David, who sat next to him, warned him he would fall off and be drowned in the water. Finding his exhortations of no avail, David grasped him by his waist, and so held him till he too lost all consciousness in slumber, and regained it in a fright—but only in time to find the old man had slipped down, and disappeared, raising no cry, and eluding all David's efforts, who vainly stooped to snatch at him in the water, which he could only feel, not see.

David resolved to say nothing of this, lest it might lead others to do the same. But it taught him a lesson, which he immediately put to practical use. He began to dig away at the shale, so as to make the seat level, and to incite others who

were awake to do the same. The Deputy, who was on the other side of him, was still among the sleepers, as David anxiously satisfied himself from time to time by listening for the sounds of his breathing; but he woke him, and constrained him to exertion—for the Deputy was overmastered by sleep or stupor, and was very loth to engage in any effort. But with David's help, both seats were thus made secure.

One circumstance greatly comforted David, who as a student in practical science, and especially well informed in all that related to mines, promptly saw its extreme importance—that the air, apart from the pressure upon it, was better than might have been reasonably expected, and likely to remain so.

David guessed what was the truth of the case—that the very calamity that imprisoned them brought a certain quantity of fresh air into the mine.

These old abandoned pits have each their shaft, which gets filled with rubbish and roofed over, and will so remain as long as the masses of water about them are quiescent; but should the water

find vent and be drawn away, the rubbish falls, and gets more and more loose, and so allows air to percolate through the old shaft into the mine.

David slept—how long he knew not—and then began for him a night, the awful terrors of which he would never after be able utterly to forget. The first thing that disturbed him was that a youth higher up, who was raging with fever and thirst, would get down into the water : partly, it seemed, to drink, but also with a half-insane hope of finding a way through the water, and through the rubbish that made progress so difficult and uncertain. He descended till the waters were up to his lips, then gave a fearful scream, to which David responded by a call to him to come back ; and guided by the voice, the youth came back ; and froze David's blood with horror as he whispered to him in passing to his place that in putting his lips to the water to drink, he had kissed the face of a dead man. Some unseen hand got hold of him, and restored him to his seat, and by degrees the poor fellow was quieted, and slept, but soon woke again with a scream, saying the devil had offered him some

of the water to drink, and made him swallow it—and then told him with a grin it was the blood of his drowned comrades.

An inexplicable noise connected with the water gave David's sad thoughts new, but scarcely less painful, occupation. It seemed to him he heard sounds that indicated another inundation was about to burst upon the doomed mine; but the gloom changed as if sudden sunshine had broken in upon it. He recognised the measured movement made by the sound, and knew it was the pump at work, and that men—perhaps under the direction of his father, Israel—must be labouring for their relief.

Some of the colliers who were at the highest point of this mount of rest and safety, and where they could stand at the water's edge, stooped with their faces close to the water, disregarding the loathsomeness of it, and drank in greedily the faint puff of wind that came along the surface, with every pressure of the pump.

Yes, David thought, his father was at work for them—and for him—but still, neither he nor any one else, outside, knowing who and where he was!

Had he been right so long to conceal himself? he asked many times during the terrors of the night; which, however, was not night only; for night passed into morning, unknown to him and his companions.

Again he slept; but, as it seemed to him, only for a few minutes, when he was awakened by the sound of a high-pitched voice—that of the Deputy, who was light-headed, and seemed to be angry that he did not get certain men sent up in a cage to bank.

‘It’s a queer thing,’ he said, ‘the pit’s been drawing coals all day; these men have done their work well; and now you won’t let them be sent to bank.’

David, with a deep sigh of relief, heard him after a little while again breathing the quieter breath of sleep.

Other men now woke, and some of them in so quarrelsome a mood that blows were struck.

A peacemaker interposed, but David heard him thrust back by others, while one among them muttered, ‘Let them fight it out with their knives; if a man is killed we may eat him for food.’

CHAPTER XX.

AN UNHEROIC HERO.

FROM the occurrences narrated in the last chapter, David learned that some portion of the incline was not deep in water.

He resolved to stay where he was no longer, but do something even if only to keep off the thoughts that preyed upon him.

Rising with great care to his feet and arching his body when his head touched the roof, he managed to walk along, between or behind the men that interposed, till he reached the furthest point of the ledge, and was obliged to descend.

Continuing his course in the same direction through the water, he found to his great satisfaction a place where there was scarcely any water about his feet.

Whether this was due, as he hoped, to the fact that the water had not only reached its highest point, but was subsiding, or that it meant he had reached a higher level than the water had yet risen to, it was a comfort for the moment, and might admit of operations calculated to ameliorate their condition.

He soon managed to get two or three men together, able and willing to help, and one of these had fortunately lighted upon a mandril or pick. With this they sounded the walls on both sides of them, moving slowly along till they found a place that seemed to give a hollower sound than they had yet heard, and here they began to work to open a hole. They succeeded more quickly than they had expected in reaching a vacant place of some kind, where there seemed to be plenty of room ; but before they could go about it and thoroughly examine it with their hands, they found the fire-damp so strong, that in obedience to David's sudden call they all retreated ; and with their jackets covered up the entrance, hastily, in the best way they could ; and then the little party sat down deeply discouraged.

Other men had come round them in the darkness. One of these said :—

‘We had better close up the hole thoroughly, or we shall have the gas in here.’

‘Let it alone,’ cried another in a hard unnatural voice ; ‘we may have to take a light in there, and blow ourselves up !’

David thought it time to remonstrate in terms of severity against this wild, foolish talk ; but scarcely had he spoken half-a-dozen words before he heard the sound of a match lighted, and saw the blaze, which increased sufficiently for him to have a glimpse of the fearful looks of the man who held the match ; but he paused no longer, and believing the lighted match was about to be thrust into the place where the gas was, he rushed upon him, struggled with and threw him to the ground, and in the struggle the match went out, and once more there was darkness.

‘Madman!’ was all David could say, as, breathless, he rose on one knee, and quitted his hold of his antagonist.

The man muttered something that David could not understand.

‘Do you know that every match is here of inestimable worth—that our lives may depend upon our power to obtain light even for so brief a space as that will give us?’

‘Do you mean to say, master, there is a ghost of a chance for us?’ asked the man sullenly, but as if opening his ears to conviction.

‘There is an excellent chance for men, intelligent men, but not for fools and—David paused for a moment, then gasped out the word he had been going to say—and cowards! Will you give me what you have?’ There was no reply for perhaps half a minute, then David heard him say—

‘There! And much good may it do you!’

David put out his hand to feel for that of the other, found it, and also found himself master of a good-sized box, quite full of matches.

He felt as if he could have kissed and hugged the man, and not simply forgiven him for what he had intended to do.

But the secret of his emotion was not the value he attached to the matches, but that the man had called forth a word of reproof—the very sound of which on his—David’s—lips—seemed at once an

inexplicable wonder, and an inestimable comfort. He call other men cowards—and not hear in reply, a universal hiss of scorn! He could not understand it—but somehow felt it was a new pledge given to fortune. He must play the hero now, however essentially in himself unheroic.

David thought and thought and thought till he was tired of thinking about the place they had penetrated into and so suddenly abandoned, perhaps unwisely.

The water could not subside for many days, and possibly might not admit of a free passage even for weeks.

Could they live all that time? Impossible.

Would it not, then, be better to risk life now in trying to open communication with some part of the mine where they might obtain the means of living? And such a part there was within reach—so David was half inclined to believe from his previous explorations and studies of Israel's plans (such of them be it observed, as Israel had chosen to show) if only they could find a safe route.

He suggested what he thought to the man who

had given up the matches, who was so moved by it that he rose at once to his feet, began to speak to a friend about it, and offered himself to fire the gas.

Others were then taken into counsel, till all who could be readily collected together were found to be of one mind—that David was right.

There was then a deep and prolonged silence. Every man thinking of what must be the hazard of that first step.

David's own voice when he at last essayed to speak, was so tremulous that he stopped—murmured something about the cold—then with renewed and painful efforts, which he tried to disguise by the familiarity of his address to them, began thus :

‘Now lads,’ said David, ‘let us face the truth. The danger is great. If the gas is confined to the small place we have been in, it is not likely to hurt us. If, on the contrary, it communicates with large quantities of gas beyond, then to fire the gas will be in all probability to bring swift destruction on us all. Are you content?’

‘Ay! Ay!’ murmured some of the men,

while others only answered by an in-drawing of breath and a gasp, scarcely to be distinguished from a groan.

But who would undertake the desperate work of the initial step—the firing of the gas?

No one asked the question, and yet all felt it was asked; and for a brief awful space there was again dead silence: even the volunteer of a few minutes ago was mute now.

David's heart sank within him, as he asked himself whether the man had changed his purpose or only waited to be spoken to.

Had not the decided tone of his own speech to them been greatly due to his supposition there was a volunteer ready?

At last, the man, as if conscious of all eyes being on him—even in the black midnight of the pit, said in a half-hearted sort of way, 'I'm willing to try!'

Then David thought of his father's old ideas of him, of all he had said to Nest, and, no longer allowing himself time for reflection, consciously hurried himself into speech.

To the astonishment of all, David refused to

allow the volunteer to undertake so desperate a risk, which might kill him, and yet save the remainder by the success of the scheme.

‘No,’ said David, though his voice shook as he spoke, and sounded not in the least resolute. ‘No ; as I proposed, I am bound to carry out my own plan. Withdraw, all of you, down the incline as far as you can. There is no gas here, so if the plan succeeds you have only to guard against the violence of the air shock. Farewell ! If—if I die, say to—to the Deputy—and to all who care for me how I died. Farewell.’

Many shook hands with him, and then they all moved away, all except the one man who had given up the matches, who swore with an oath—for which he apologised immediately after to David—that he would stick to him, and help him if he could.

David took a newspaper from his pocket, opened it, then crumpled it lightly together into a little heap, and thrust it within the hole and into the unknown space beyond as far as he could, lying on his breast the while.

Then he took one of the matches and lighted it,

while guarding his face, and committing his soul to God. And then he thrust forward the lighted match to the paper.

The instantaneous storm of fire did not come. Neither the match nor the paper would burn. For a moment he knew not what to do. Suddenly he recollected that the gas must be too dense, and needed admixture of air. He crawled back and fanned air into the place, and again repeated his operations;—with the same result; though the light did not go out so instantaneously. For a third time he contended, and this time successfully. An explosion took place—by no means a serious one—and which did him no harm whatever.

He entered the place, lit another match, and saw he was in a natural hollow of the rock, quite uninjured either by the previous explosion or by the inundation.

A second glance inspired a thrill of joy. He saw an opening leading to another level. In hurriedly feeling round the place in the darkness he had missed this.

The level led him into the part he expected to

find—a large district that had been worked and abandoned, much of which was on the same high-level as their place of shelter.

But a most important idea was immediately suggested to David. He remembered quite well to have noticed that the stable with some horses, and an engine for pumping water, and some sort of store place for candles, oil, and various things often required in the mine were all located close by this abandoned district; and lay, not high certainly, but still above the lowest levels, and therefore might possibly be got at in this way, while by the ordinary route they were quite inaccessible.

With a quickening pulse he hastened to verify his hope, but while he satisfied himself he was right as to the localities, he found unhappily the water much too high to admit of his reaching either the stable, the engine place, or the little store place.

He went back, however, in good heart to communicate his news to the Deputy, if only he should be well enough to listen to him and understand him.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MINER'S PSALM.

DAVID found the Deputy seeking him in the place where the entrance had been made from the incline. He was, or seemed to be, much recovered, and full of grief that so much time had been lost.

He certainly had regained all his clearness of intellectual vision, and David took care to ask no questions that might suggest to the Deputy the state from which he had just escaped.

His first great satisfaction seemed to be that they had now room to assemble together and to move freely about ; and he begged David to draw all the men down from their dangerous perch, and to be careful not to lose a single one.

‘Life enough has been sacrificed, and for which some of us perhaps may have to answer to our

common Father, so let us be careful now. Quick, David, my son, for I have something to say to them and to you.'

The men soon came hurrying into the new place of shelter; and were about to disperse through the different roads in the search for whatever they might find promising present relief or future extrication, when the Deputy raising his voice, cried—

'The water is there too. You will only lose time. Listen to me!'

They gathered accordingly, marshalling themselves as well as they could in the darkness into some sort of order, and then the Deputy began—

'Brothers, have we not already even in this state of darkness and terror enjoyed the inestimable benefit of God's mercy? Speak, you whom He moved to come to our succour—though strangers to us—speak, you whose lives have been spared during four fearful days and nights of anguish. We, who have been but as instruments in your redemption, seeking to pay back what you generously lent—risk for risk, life against life—we speak to you now, and ask you now also to

speak as men, brothers, Christians, to the harder hearts among us, who think the war of the elements is not enough to overwhelm us, but they must raise the infinitely more evil, wicked, and senseless war of man's own violent, reckless passions.

‘O my brethren, heirs as ye are to the most inestimable dowry that the soul of man can conceive—Christ's love—will you refuse this at your Maker's hands, and turn your backs to Him, and for what? only that you may stand face to face with the devil, with the enemy of man, who no doubt waits to embrace you and hold you fast enough, if only you so will it!

‘Blows have been stricken, I hear, though I bless my God He did not let me hear them; but, oh, my brethren, I feel them, ay, a thousand times more keenly than those on whom they were inflicted.

‘But I will not dwell, as I intended, on the crimes beyond this sad beginning that have followed or might have followed. Let us only whisper it among ourselves with the shuddering horror of men who have human hearts, that there

is no extremity of evil to which we may not go if we once give way—suicide, murder, cannibalism lie at the one end of the dreadful balance where our fate is suspended ; peace, hope, brotherhood at the other. Which then shall it be ? Choose.

‘Death ! And is that so awful that we can wish to evade it by atrocities that blister the lips but to speak of ?

‘Death ! Miners, and not know how to die ! Ah, my brethren, shall I tell you in deep humility of heart and bitter distress of soul that death to me, if in dying I could keep you all alive, would be so sweet, that I should feel recompensed for a long life of trouble ?’

The listening miners could no longer contain themselves, but burst out—several speaking at once—

‘Ay ! ay ! We believe that. That is true, master ! O God, help us ! God, help us ! He only can !’ ‘And our wives !’ ‘And children !’

Such were the exclamations that now burst forth on all sides, mingled with tears and sobs, and passionate wringing of hands, and convulsive beating of breasts.

‘Listen! Listen to me! I command you. What would you say if I could prove to you that God has expressly foreseen all you now suffer, the very place in which you are, and has inspired the very words and thoughts best calculated to express for you your own emotions?’

‘Where? Where? Tell us!’ some cried in voices of intense earnestness, while others asked, but so despairingly as to show they wished for no answer,—

‘What does he mean?’

‘Ah, my brethren, see what you must be made to endure before you will know your true friends, but let us also see that when you are made you do indeed prize them.

‘Hearken, then, to the words of the inspired Psalmist, draw comfort from them, such comfort as the truth can best afford. I am not striving to teach you how to live, but how best to die, if you must die!’

The sounds of anguish and cruel disappointment called forth by these words stopped the Deputy, for a minute or two, as though he were himself too deeply affected by the grief and despair to go on.

Perhaps he was thus induced to change his purpose, and seem less stern as to what he desired to say about their fate.

‘I hear all about me signs and tokens of heart-rending anguish. I cannot quarrel with that. I am like you, brothers—my own dear brothers—but a frail man, and feeling pain in every nerve of my body, and fear and anguish and doubt alternating with hope and faith and joy in every effort of my soul, while I see death on the one hand, and escape on the other.

‘Let me, then, so far as I dare, bid you yet be of good cheer.’

‘You mean ——’ burst out one loud passionate voice.

‘I mean that the men who will be resigned, patient, brave for death, truly so, mind! no hypocrisy of believing all the while they are not going to be tested :—I mean—I say—that for such men God may yet do great and wonderful things, and that if we trust to Him we shall acquit ourselves worthily, whether it be for living or dying.’

‘There’s hope in that man’s soul, though he’s afraid to tell us so!’ muttered some voice during a

deep, significant pause, and others took up the cry, so that a low, buzzing, animated sound ran through the place.

‘Now, brothers, listen to what the Bible can tell us about our condition—we poor miners. Do you not already feel, as I do, a kind of light streaming through our hearts, at the thought of having God, or, what is the same thing, God’s inspired prophet, standing among us and speaking in this cause for us?’

‘I hope my memory will not fail me! I do hope that!’

‘The psalm I am about to try to repeat to you has been my comfort and solace many and many a dark hour—ay, darker than that of the deepest pit.

‘Draw round me—as nigh as you can. My voice is yet but feeble. And I would not have you lose one word of words all so inestimable. Listen then with all your hearts:—

‘O Lord God of my salvation, I have cried day and night before Thee;

‘Let my prayer come before Thee: incline Thy ear unto my cry;

‘For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave.

‘I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength:

‘Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from Thy hand.

‘Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

‘Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves. Selah.

‘Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

‘Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon Thee: I have stretched out my hands unto Thee.

‘Wilt Thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Selah.

‘Shall Thy loving kindness be declared in the grave? or Thy faithfulness in destruction?

‘Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

‘But unto Thee have I cried, O Lord ; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee.

‘Lord, why castest Thou off my soul ? why hidest Thou Thy face from me ?

‘I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up : while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted.

‘Thy fierce wrath goeth over me ; Thy terrors have cut me off.

‘They came round about me daily like water ; they compassed me about together.

‘Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.’

One might well despair of any attempt even to suggest an adequate notion of the effect produced by the Deputy's recital of this psalm, the eighty-eighth. It was accompanied, at the close of every verse after the third, by low but most fervent and passionate ejaculations—at first confined to a few persons, but their numbers increasing with every verse, till at the close, the self-control of the miners, and their intense de-

sire to let no word escape them, gave way, and indescribable indeed became the scene.

But the Deputy, whose instincts were so vivid and true that he understood—nay, anticipated every change their behaviour exhibited, knew now that they were no longer the same men they had been a little while before; that the hearts and minds of all were greatly lifted up, and that from that moment he might almost deal with them as he pleased.

As the profound agitation became a little lessened, one voice from a far corner cried out—

‘Again, Master! Again! Blessed words! Since these are all we have to hope for, feed us with them. Let us not go hungry of soul unto death!’

‘Ay!’ ‘Ay!’ ‘Again!’ ‘Again!’

But David here interposed. The Deputy, as he ceased, had leaned against him, and presently took David’s hand. The young man felt how he trembled, and saw that he would never pass alive through many such scenes as this.

‘The Deputy is ill,’ he said. ‘Of course he

will not tell you that. But I do.' Can we afford to lose him?'

'I'm afraid if we do,' said one man, too well known among the colliers for his irreligious life and conversation, 'that'll be the same for me as losing God and Christ into the bargain—for I've only just gotten to believe in 'em a bit.'

'I propose, then,' said David, 'that we ask him to write for us on the wall these holy and precious words—so that they may belong to us all—be ever ready to comfort us when we need them. For my part I own how deeply I am ashamed to say, I make practical acquaintance with this wonderful miner's psalm for the first time. Were you not all in the same condition?'

'Ay!' 'Ay, master!' was the response from several voices.

'Is there anyone here who had before to-day realised it as he now realises it? If so, let him speak.'

No one did speak.

Some conversation in a low tone now took place between the Deputy and David, and those

around them began to fear the former was too ill even to do what was asked.

He revived, however, by drinking some water ; and then the question was about the light.

The lamps were collected, and by the aid of the matches it was seen that a small quantity of oil, sufficient to fill one lamp, was obtainable.

And so, after a time, the Deputy was able to see to write with chalk on the smooth surface of the coal—which happened to be well suited for the purpose—the psalm he had recited, and which all now agreed to call evermore—if an ‘evermore’ there should be found for them—as David had called it, the Miner’s Psalm.

But when he had gotten part way through, and reached the verse :—*Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps*, he stopped and cried aloud with an enthusiasm that was electrical, ‘*The lowest pit no more !* Glory to His name !’—and then, overpowered by the grand cry that broke simultaneously from all hearts of ‘Glory to His name !’ he fainted ; and would have fallen but for David, who watched him with the most unfaltering care and devotion, and supported

him in his arms till he revived, and while the remainder was inscribed by David, at the Deputy's dictation.

When he had done, the Deputy whispered something faintly to David, who spake out in a loud, manly voice,

‘The Deputy wishes me to say how he shares congratulations with you on the testimony we leave behind us for our dear ones to reflect on—if’—but there David stopped, as if to listen to something the Deputy wanted to say to him.

Then again David spoke aloud:—

‘He begs that all will now be calm, and he hopes in a few hours to speak to you again practically as to what he thinks may and ought to be done. I have assured him that it shall be so, and that he may rest in the absolute confidence that we shall try to acquit ourselves as men worthy of such a leader. Is it not so?’

‘Ay! ay!’ was the universal response; and then the men sat or lay down wherever they could best accommodate themselves, to ponder over all that he had said, and on all that he might yet be going to say.

For as David could not but see, there still lingered in the hearts of all not only the hope of life, but the belief that the Deputy shared the hope ; but was afraid of being untrue to the mission he had received relative to another and better world, if he too soon comforted them in connection with the world in which they still were, and in which they very much yearned to stay.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ROLL-CALL.

THE Deputy's first use of recovered strength was to make David summon the whole of the men together, and begin the work of government.

It was full time. The good effect of the Deputy's late appeal was fast wearing off, and the pangs of hunger and thirst, the intolerable heat and darkness of the mine, the growing sense of languor—which seemed only to change, if it changed at all, into a restless, irritable, passionate, and at times, almost frenzied despair—all this took the place of the resignation as regards this world, and the holy faith as regarding another, that the Deputy had succeeded for a brief time in infusing into their hearts.

And when the work began of collecting the men for the introduction of the new state of things

the Deputy was shaping out in his thoughts, it took more time than he and David had calculated on.

The miners had become moved by all the natural variety of individual impulses their position was calculated to bring forth : some desiring the society of the crowd, some of particular friends or acquaintances, some finding relief only in solitude, and jealously concealing themselves where in the darkness they could not easily be found.

But at last they were all drawn together, and the Deputy took a paper from his pocket, calling aloud for David—who, though he knew it not, was as usual close to him—and demanded if there was oil enough yet in the lamp for him to read by for a few minutes.

It turned out there was. The lamp was lighted, and by the faint illumination David examined his paper ; which showed a list of names—numbered in the margin from one to twenty-one—the last being the Deputy's own : David's not included (for he had come down alone and unrecognised), nor the names of the saved explorers.

David knew what the list meant, and was in

no difficulty as to what to do when the Deputy, in a high-pitched, much shaken voice, bade him begin.

‘James Morgan!’ cried David in a tone that no one could fail to hear or understand.

‘Here! God be praised!’ was the reply.

‘Hiram Holt!’

The call was heard in silence.

‘Is he dead?’ asked the Deputy in a low voice of those around him.

‘No—I only wish he were!’ responded Hiram Holt himself, then first breaking silence. ‘You and the rest are only too good—too pious a company for such as me.’

‘Feed my sheep!’ said the Deputy, in a voice that seemed addressed as much to his own inquiring, doubtful soul, asking what ought to be done, as to Hiram Holt. ‘What did the Saviour mean by that? Would He—even He—with all He had to say to such a world, have scorned that food which the body needs for nourishment? No. Hiram Holt, neither will we. Let it be thy task to take possession and to sacredly guard for the use of all whatever thou canst find or come at

that may help us to pass through this dreadful valley of the shadow of death, which, after all, may be only the shadow.'

'Dost thou say so?' said Hiram Holt, half mockingly. 'Where then shall I begin? Methinks my labours of collector will soon be over. I know not even of a candle-end within reach; shall I begin with our leather boots?'

'Begin with stripping the bark from the props. The inner bark of those recently put up is soft, and can be chewed; and of those not so lately put up, the pulpy matter crumbles to the hand, and may be eaten after maceration in water; and thus—bad as the case is—we may still extract sufficient nourishment to keep the flame of life burning within, however feebly, for some little time—several days if need be—while the water subsides a little. "All flesh is grass," says the inspired Book, and science teaches us how the vegetable and animal world melt into each other.'

'Well, and then?' demanded Hiram Holt.

'Then we may be able to get to the candle store, and to the horses, and to oil for our lamps; and then, Hiram, with that food, I rely on

thee as an honest man, to have and permit no concealments, but to work for all, as all shall work for thee."

'I accept the trust,' said Hiram, evidently gratified at the way in which the Deputy had dealt with him.

The roll-call went on:—

'Patrick Sullivan!'

'Here and hearty—sir, at your service! Leastways, as well as can be expected, and much glory to God, and many thanks to you!' cried a warm-hearted Irishman.

'Charles Dorman!'

'Here, sir—hoping to live—willing to die, and trusting all to the blessed Redeemer. Christ be praised! Lord be praised!'

'James Knott!'

No reply.

Again the name was called, and questions asked from whence it was clear he was in the mine, was not known to be dead, but was missing, leaving no traces behind.

'Sullivan,' said the Deputy, 'be it your task as soon as this roll-call is over to hunt him up. Take

one or two others with you, and matches ; but find him I conjure you ! Find him, I say !’

‘I will, sir ! By the Lord, I will if there be anything of him left.’

The roll-call went on :—

‘Hugh Williams !’

‘Dead !’ cried a smothered voice after a pause.

‘Died he well ?’ demanded the Deputy.

Again there was a pause, and then the words were heard dropping with difficulty—

‘Ask no more ! He died.’

‘John Law !’

There was no reply.

‘He was here and living an hour ago, and sharing heartily in praise and prayer,’ said a quavering, melancholy voice.

‘John Law !’ again cried David, and more loudly.

‘That man’s hiding,’ whispered another voice to David. ‘He has lost heart again, and wants to make away with himself, if only he can find the will to do it, when we mayn’t know.’

‘John Law !’ then called out the Deputy, ‘in Christ’s name I bid thee answer if that thou livest !’

Canst thou lie, even by silence, to Him? Come forth, John Law!’

‘Let me alone, can’t you?’ was the sullen reply of John Law when he found he could no longer be silent. ‘A pretty set to be among where a man can’t even die as he likes, and in quiet, after making his peace with God!’ These last words were spoken in a strangely troubled, hesitating, unpeaceful kind of words and manner.

‘Made your peace with God! You have done that! The very man then we sorely need and covet. Come forth,’ cried the Deputy, ‘and teach us too that most precious of all earthly lessons—peace with God—which ever means peace also with our own souls, ay, peace and joy!’

He came, and all made way for him till he reached the Deputy and David.

The Deputy took his reluctant hand as he said—

‘Thou knowest I have little strength and much call upon it. All must help. Thy task must be to keep the dead-register day by day. Write down then the date of the day, and begin with the words “OUR DEAD,” and the name of Hugh Williams. I

should fear to give this task to most who are here, but thou, I know well, wilt be faithful to the record and keep it truly. Begin ! ’

Something in the morbid nature of the man akin to his task, and something of force in the idea of having work of any kind to do in such a place however dreadful, caused the man to accept his duty, and at once begin—first, to fulfil the directions given, then to listen for what additions, if any, might have to be made.

By the time the roll had been gone through and perfected by the addition of the ten explorers, it was found to contain thirty-two names ; but out of these John Law’s death-list included no less than seven unfortunates.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CREATING A SOUL UNDER THE RIBS OF DEATH.

THE roll-call over, the Deputy invited all to join with him in a solemn religious service, and to decide that they would hold such services at least thrice a day.

They should be short, he said, suited to their physical weakness, but earnest and life-giving, to accord with their great spiritual need.

So the voices of prayer and supplication rose, and in such tones as no ordinary church or chapel-goers can even conceive of, so passionate and intense was their character.

Then, too, was heard the voice, which is ordinarily one of admonition in the form of a sermon. But the Deputy's heart was too wise for that now. He knew well that it was communion—comfort—and not preaching the hearers needed. They

were staggering on the edge of a world that seemed fast slipping from under their feet ; and the Deputy's task was to make them feel not only that such a world might go, and yet they not be lost, but to show them that the other world—the one full of such inconceivable happiness and glory—could only be reached by them—and not by them only, the sad victims of calamity—but by all, however rich, thriving, and comfortable, in the same way, by the exact same kind of sacrifice. Between the poor miners here, and the kindest hearts outside, now sympathising with their condition, the fate so much dreaded was only a question of a little more or less of time, while the thing to be gained was a question of eternity.

And lastly, swelled out the rough, and for the most part, untutored voices, with a hymn and a melody, that, however discordant to an earthly musician, was as the voices of seraphs to the Deputy's ravished ear. They sang one of the simplest and most child-like of hymns, one that had nourished the boyhood of many a listener, and which had never seemed half so sweet, soothing, and precious as now.

‘Ah! my brethren,’ murmured the Deputy, with streaming eyes, at the close, ‘ask now of yourselves, ask of your own hearts, whether there is not comfort in this; and whether there could be any enemy more deadly than he who should shake your faith, lessen your fervour, and carry you back to the old chaotic, selfish state from which we are escaping. Hold fast, then, the good you have; and if the other good we seek, wish for, yearn for—why should we deny it?—if life here, and the nobler life beyond are both to be ours, how great will be our consolation to be able to look back upon these hours and see how manfully we bore ourselves through them! So that every way we gain by our faith in God, by our love for one another. If now we die, we die prepared. If we live, we live to know how much better life can be made, and so again become still more worthy of our ultimate reception into the bosom of God.

‘Let us then resolve to have but this one law of brotherhood or love; love to guide us through every hour, every pang, every effort, every mood of despair, for such moods will come.

‘To work, then, dear brethren. Weak as we are in our frames, and weaker as we may expect them to become, there is wonderful power in the spirit that wills, and in the spirit that believes, to control the frame that cannot will or believe. Faintness, hunger, disease—all these things we must expect—all these we must fight with; but take courage—feel you can be master, and master you will be. Let ours be the faith that can remove mountains, and mountains of doubt, depression, difficulty will be lifted from our heads.

‘My voice rebels against me, or there is much more I would say. My young friend here—David—to him I confide what my powers are insufficient for—the practical direction of affairs. There is much to be done. We must watch hourly the rise or fall of the water, and mark thrice a day the highest line, so that we may not deceive ourselves as to the truth.

‘We must institute an unbroken series of signals in the places where those who may try to succour us will be most likely to hear them.

‘We must try to open new communications. It is a vital matter that all possible skill and energy should be directed to reaching our food—and

light. Both are near, and it is quite possible that in a few hours both may be in our possession. There is even a thought in my mind, which I dared not before tell you, but that now I will, in the belief that you will not let it unduly influence you. I think, then, that Israel Mort will spare no pains to get at us ; his plans of the mine are perfect ; he must know where we are if we live, and which would be the shortest way to reach us from the surface, without passing through the waters that occupy the lower parts of the mine.'

He paused, for this new thought, which had been vaguely growing in many minds, and now first found expression, raised new tumults of hope, and agitation, and distress.

'Yes, brethren,' he went on, 'these things are so, and being so, impose new duties upon us. The first duty is obedience. I ask you to obey him, my friend, my almost son. He is skilful, devoted to you, and if all that you already know of him is not enough, let me then tell you this—behold in him, my brethren, David Mort, the boy who left his home rather than be forced into the mine ! He it is who now shares your fate so bravely, and earnestly covets from God the wondrous and un-

speakable privilege of helping you out of this fearful strait if that be possible.'

A feeble and yet enthusiastic shout succeeded to the first emotion of surprise among the miners at the news thus made known to them. And then from more than one voice rose the cry—

'Does Israel, does his father know?'

'I deeply regret to say he does not. But we will deliver him up to that father, will we not, safe and sound?'

'Ay, that we will, if God only lets us,' warmly responded.

'You well remind me of what I had forgotten for the moment;—ay, if only God lets us. Teach me, dear brethren, always thus. Only make me not too proud to be so taught. And now sing me another hymn; inexpressible is the comfort your mingled voices give me. That which the eye cannot see the ear can hear. Come!' And so saying he himself began with the first two lines of a verse, which he slightly altered for the occasion—

Out of the depths to Thee we cry.
Our voice, Lord, do Thou hear!

but he could go no further, so shut his eyes, and listened in a kind of divine ecstasy to the rest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

THE Deputy's strength was now so completely prostrated, that he could only lie in the corner where David's loving hands had managed to make for him a not uncomfortable bed; and there receive from time to time reports of everything done or attempted, and of the actual state of the air, water, &c., of the mine.

It was wonderful what new strength this very weakness of the Deputy infused into David's soul. The appeal to him seemed so irresistible that he could not think so ill of himself as to believe it possible he could be deaf to it—or that there could be any other conceivable course open than that he should strive humbly to do all Rees Thomas would have done, and that he should strive to do it in something of Rees Thomas' spirit.

Leaving to the men appointed their various tasks, he addressed himself to the question of how best the stables and store-places already spoken of might be reached.

There was not an hour to be lost. The people in the mine were already greatly enfeebled. Let more time elapse, and they would scarcely be able to lift a hand, even with the chances of salvation open before them.

Taking with him the man who had lighted the match in so desperate a mood—as if prepared to blow them all up and have done with the struggle, but who since then had followed him about with the mute fidelity of a dog, content to do anything he was bidden to do, and seeking no reward beyond a word or two of mental patting on the head—David led the way to a distant level, which presently began to slope downwards.

‘Take care,’ said David, ‘the ground is slippery, and the water’s here.’

They moved on with careful steps, till they touched with their feet the black depths that gleamed beneath the light of the collier’s lamp.

‘Now Elliott,’ said David, ‘I want to consult

with you about this. Hold the lamp as far out as you can over the water, and look in !’

Elliott did as he was told. They were at this moment standing in a gallery scarcely five feet wide, and less than four feet high, sloping down into the water. Elliott looked long and earnestly, then with a sigh turned and said,

‘ Ah, Master David, it’s a hopeless job, if you mean that the food lies beyond this, and can only be obtained by going through it.’

‘ Why ? ’

‘ Because the water’s up to the roof, only a few yards off.’

‘ Yes, I suppose so. But do you think it impossible for a man to wade and dive through to the other side ? ’

‘ Oh, Master—the job’s too fearful ! Think on it ; no possibility of rising to the top for a mouthful of air if you need it ever so bad ; and perhaps further to go than the strongest swimmer could manage, even if he knew the blue sky was above him, should he suddenly feel he must have a look at it.’

‘ Yes, I have thought just the same. But some-

how fear itself begets a kind of courage, and I want to know which is best—lie here in safety, such as it is, and die for want of food; or risk our not very valuable lives, under present circumstances, and perhaps succeed in saving every man in the mine.’

‘Ah, Master David, what’s the use of deceiving ourselves? I can see you know well enough that no power on earth can open a way for us through the water that lies betwixt us and the shaft for many a day, perhaps for many a week to come. Ah, Master David, we shall all be stiff and stark afore that happens!’

‘Suppose my father knows where we are in this high district. Suppose he knows of the probability we may have air. Suppose he knows a short way to us, that he may open before many days. Suppose he knows that we can only want food, and that that is obtainable if only we have manly courage enough to seek it, through this dip. Suppose all that—and what then?’

‘Why then, Master, I’m willing to do as you do—stake life agin life with you—and hope for the best.’

‘ Ah, Elliott, I knew what you’d say ! I knew my man, you see, when I chose you. Come, then. Let us to work. Here, help me to uncoil this rope.’

David had wound round his waist a piece of rope, light, but strong. This was taken off carefully, so as not to get entangled.

‘ Now,’ said David, ‘ my plan is to tie this rope about one of us, while the other holds the end, and pays it out carefully, inch by inch, never letting it slacken ; so that the man who is in the water may be drawn back at the first sign that he is stopped by some obstacle, or unable from any cause to advance further. If two distinctly separate pulls be given, let that be a signal to wait. Two more implies going on as before. You understand ? ’

‘ Ay, ay, Master David, it’s plain enough.’

‘ Well, now, take your choice which shall go first. I quite expect we may have to try and try again before getting through.’

‘ Let’s toss for it, Master David ! ’

‘ No, say which you like, and let’s begin.’

‘ Fair play, Master David, ’s a jewel, that shines

even in such infernal darkness as we've gotten here. Let's have fair play.'

'Why haven't I offered you fair play—and more?'

'Ay, that's the mischief—"fair play and more;" I don't think you should expect me to go first, and I certainly shan't let you go first, so as to reflect on me.'

'Oh, well, you're a strange, inconsistent fellow, Elliott, but let it be as you like.'

The collier took a coin from his pocket, and placed it on the palm of one hand while covering it with the other, and looked enquiringly at David as he said,

'If you guess right, I go first. If wrong, you go first.'

'Do you mind reversing it? Instead of making the task a penalty, let it be one of honour and privilege. If I am wrong in my guess, let me lose the right to begin.'

'So be it,' said Elliott with a dry laugh.

'They shall say of us we were loyal to the last,' exclaimed David with something between a

laugh and a sigh, 'so I pronounce it is the Queen's head that you so affectionately protect.'

Elliott lifted his hand, and both the men looked eagerly. David's guess had failed.

Elliott looked half savagely at him for a moment, as if suspecting some devilry, but recollecting himself, said,

'All right! I'm ready!'

While the rope was being fastened, David gave Elliott the benefit of his thoughts.

'Be very careful not to confuse yourself with the sides of the level, or before you know what you're about you'll be butting against one of them, and thinking you're trying to go ahead against impossibilities.'

Elliott listened, and took in the advice thoroughly. And then David added—

'Mind, there is at some part of this dip, as I myself well remember, an opening; a place where the roof suddenly expands and gets higher. That space must have air. It may be that you may reach that before you reach a spot on the ascending slope of the dip, where there will be air once more, between the water and the roof.'

‘And how, in God’s name, am I to know when I get to that hollow place in the roof, if I do get there? Am I to keep bobbing my head against the roof all the way to find it?’

David sighed as he answered—

‘I cannot answer you. I tell you all I know.’

‘Well, Master David, good-bye!’

‘Good-bye! I’ll look sharp after you, trust me.’ responded David.

The man went in, moving slowly, feeling now this side, now that, now the roof, till he could scarcely any longer be seen.

David nervously kept the rope at full stretch, and thus was conscious of a sudden stop.

Then there was a violent pull, and two or three yards of the rope were drawn out. David understood. The man had gone as far as he could by wading, then plunged into the water. Some moments of fearful suspense followed. The rope flickered as it were with a series of fitful pulls, but no more was drawn out; then it sensibly slackened and became still.

In half a minute more the almost senseless form was being dragged up the slope by David out

of the water, and brandy being administered to the cold but quivering lips.

Elliott soon revived. His story briefly was that he found on diving nothing but obstruction whichever way he moved, till he knew no more.

Yes, that which David had warned him against had happened. He had lost consciousness of the straight line between the sides of the gallery, had turned partially round and become hopelessly confused.

David waited only till he saw Elliott was able to take charge of the end of the rope. A kind of frenzy for speed seemed to possess him, that took away his faculties. He felt for a moment as if he must go to swift destruction, were it only through his incapacity to guide himself rightly and clearly through the undertaking.

But the chill of the water seemed to bring back concentration of purpose; and then, as though the darkness of the awful place were suddenly illumined by some glorious light, there came a thought of his father, a thought of Nest, a thought that this terrible way was after all *the way to them*: and from that moment the worst was passed.

He took care to go to the very farthest possible point where air remained betwixt the water and the roof, before letting his face be covered.

Then taking as deep an inspiration of breath as he could, he strode on, not attempting to swim, but moving swiftly, feeling sides and roof, restraining emotion, assuring himself every instant he could yet hold out without suffocation—that the space in the roof would soon be reached.

But his feet got unsteady, his hands began to be aimless; he felt that if his next, his last effort to reach the goal should prove a failure, he must turn and be drawn back—perhaps in death.

When he could bear no more, convulsively he lifted both his hands. Nothing opposed them. He stood up erect. He was able to breathe again. Then feeling a tug at the rope, he remembered his signal, and gave two pulls and rested.

A few seconds were thus spent: and with so much of relief that David guessed there must be some aperture for the entrance of air from a more open part of the mine. He felt for it, found it, and discovered there was an opening of some

size, perhaps large enough for him to get through.

He felt hollows in the wall or side, which had doubtless been used before to climb by. By these he ascended, got through the hole, lighted his lamp by a match, both of which he had carefully packed in oil-cloth obtained from a miner's ragged waterproof, and then found himself master of all he had so much coveted ; within a hundred and fifty yards of him were, as he well knew, the store-houses and the stables.

He removed the rope from his waist, and made it fast by tying it to a stick he found, and which he so placed across the hole on the side away from the water that it could not be drawn through by Elliott, should he get alarmed about the long delay.

His first objects of search were for things that could be used as food. He found one horse still living, though lying half senseless on the litter. David did not hesitate a moment to play the butcher with a sharp clasp-knife, and put the poor creature out of its misery, while leaving it as a precious article of food. A large quantity of

candles was in the store. Oil in abundance, also, David found. So there was that which would serve as food for all for many days, and also give light for all when light might be indispensable.

As he began to return, his ear caught the sound of trickling water. Eagerly he sought for it. And delightedly he drank. He wondered as to the origin of the water in the dip. It certainly had nothing to do with the inundation. And the water itself, by its comparative purity, showed the same. Surely there must be a vent from the dip, which had accidentally got stopped up. Imagine the power of such a thought at such a moment, suggesting as it did he might not again be obliged, cold and wet as he was, to retrace that dreadful way. To his unspeakable delight, alike as regarded himself and the little band of fellow-captives, he found the orifice, pulled out through the ooze one rag after another, till at last great part of a collier's jacket came away, and was followed by a rush of water, the noise of which seemed to David the very sweetest music it had ever been his fortune to listen to.

He thought now he would not attempt to go

back till he could do so without danger or difficulty ; so he roamed about arranging how he would bring all the men to this new place ; where they should sit in their hours of rest, and lie when they slept ; how they might best use their food, much of it so unpalatable ; whether a fire were possible for cooking, and so on.

While he was thus luxuriating in the new domain he had conquered, he heard a voice so close to his ear, and so appalling in its suddenness and unexpectedness, that he screamed out ; then saw it was Elliott, tried to laugh off his fright, but was obliged to sit down and be silent awhile before he could recover from the shock his whole system had received.

Elliott meanwhile explained how he had seen the water moving away, had guessed what David had done, had fastened his end of the rope, and guided by that had followed the water right to the hole where the rope ended, and where he knew David must have passed through.

How David hurried back with the news, how the whole available strength and skill of the buried captives was used to take every man in

safety through the water, some requiring to be carried the whole way to the new quarters, need not be enlarged upon.

The change came just in time to save many, and among them the Deputy.

They were all now ill, weak, more or less desponding, but they had food, air, light as much as they dared to enjoy, knowing that every drop of oil burned to waste might mean in the end death brought an hour nearer to them, when the only hope was to hold out till relief came, if relief were possible.

CHAPTER XXV.

DAVID'S VOW.

No more sad or fearful picture ever entered the mind of poet or painter than that which was presented when first oil became sufficiently plentiful among them for all to be able to supply their lamps; and when at the invitation of David, who thought the incident would do good both for the moment and afterwards when reflected on, they all lighted them, and thus were enabled after so many days to see each other's faces in their new place of shelter.

David, on the plea of economy and with an attempt to be jocular, instantly caused all the lamps but one—his own—to be put out again; but confessed afterwards to the Deputy his motive, that he had been shocked at his own thoughtlessness, when he saw how ghastly were the faces and forms presented.

When all had been done that the Deputy and David had thought of any use; when all the available stores of the mine had been garnered up, and were fast being used; when it became clear that weeks might yet elapse before Israel and his helpers could descend through the bottom of the shaft and extricate them, so slowly did the waters subside; when there was no longer hope of the Deputy's idea being realised of their opening out a communication with the surface that should evade the water; when even the 'morning,' afternoon,' and 'nightly' services—so called, though night might be day and day night for aught they knew—began to fail of their first inspiring effect, and chiefly through the Deputy's physical exhaustion;—when all these influences together began to press upon the unhappy miners, they seemed to abandon hope—to turn vengefully against even a suggestion inclining that way, and then was for the Deputy and David, too, as for the rest, what seemed the darkest hours.

So he and they thought. But they were mistaken. A startling incident occurred that roused the prostrate community from their death-like

sleep and torpor, as effectually as if they had then heard the trumpet of the archangel at the last day calling them in common with the dead from their graves.

And yet the sound heard was perhaps the very faintest, feeblest that man ever listened to while his heart beat tumultuously and his soul cried out to him, 'It is the voice of fate !'

David was lying alone on a slope, wondering whether Nest had any suspicion of his being there. Was she thinking he had played her a trick, unworthy perhaps, not altogether truthful, but which she might consider done in the purest spirit of self-sacrificing love. The letter he had written to her, and which the reader has seen, nowhere distinctly said he was not going down. If she noticed that fact, he feared she would refuse to believe he was still busy in the upper world. If, when the inundation became known, she had had any suspicion of his being in the mine, she would have gone to Israel ; and in her alarm perhaps let him guess or discover who the agent from London was ; but as Israel himself knew nothing of his presence in the pit, Nest, of

course, would go away relieved as to her fears for him.

This was the theme he was turning over, not once, but many times, languidly in his thoughts (for energy of any kind was no longer possible), trying to satisfy himself there was no mistake, and that, whatever his ultimate destiny, Nest would be spared at least the intolerable torture of suspense.

But somehow he was in a condition when suggestions of comfort of any kind seemed to be a poison, and poison of the most disgusting kind, and therefore to be unhesitatingly rejected.

Then if she did know or suspect he was in the mine, what would she do?

‘Raise heaven and earth in his behalf if that were possible,’ said David to himself, with a half-smile, but one which was wholly of intense bitterness.

For what could she do? Nothing! Nothing where Israel, his father, saw no way to relief.

At that moment he felt as if a kind of supernatural, impalpable bullet had been fired right

into his brain, and had electrified every nerve and muscle of his body.

It was a mere thought—the thought that at that instant of time he had heard the faintest echo of a tap. It seemed too delicate, too ethereal to be the tap itself, but was like its echo. Putting one hand to his forehead to quell the rising tumult there, he partly raised himself to a sitting posture with the other, and listened as a prisoner in the dock on a capital charge might listen, the moment before the foreman of the jury opened his lips to deliver his verdict.

He sat—rigid, immovable—for, perhaps, five minutes.

What awful minutes they were! each being interrogated as it passed, and each mutely passing on.

No repetition, no confirmation of the supposed sound came.

Suddenly, with a cry of anger at his own folly, he turned, and prostrated himself at full length, with his brow tightly pressed against the ground.

There, too, he stayed motionless, for a time—perhaps a couple of minutes.

Then he raised his head, with a passionate, broken ejaculation :

‘ O Father of mercies, wouldst Thou deceive ? ’
and again he bowed his head for another minute.

Then he almost sprang to his feet, and paced to and fro.

‘ If I make any mistake, how am I to bear the truth afterwards ?

‘ If I tell them what I believe, and the event proves me a liar, will they not call me their worse than murderer, and say I have killed their souls ?

‘ O God, Thou wilt not mistake me if I do not now throw myself at Thy feet in a transport of gratitude and love, for the question is of Thy will, and what is Thy will with us all just now. But if this truly be Thy will, that Thou dost confirm what all my senses tell me that I heard but now, not once but thrice—measured blows—at equal and slow intervals of time—not in the least like the miner’s blow when at work ; if this be true, and we be saved, I here, in these dreadful deeps,

vow to Thee to dedicate my whole future life, my knowledge gained or to gain, my skill, such as Thou hast given—in a word, the utmost effort of my whole being, to the helpless miners' cause ; in the hope and assured belief that these calamities may absolutely be prevented, and the life of the miner made more worthy of Thee and of the infinite faculties Thou hast given him. Amen !'

Then once more he stooped to listen for several minutes. When he rose he was calm and collected, and went away to seek the Deputy and three or four of the miners, who could best be trusted with the supposed or real discovery.

They came, and one and all, in transports of joy, confirmed the fact that deliverers were near.

They would have replied—did, indeed, make feeble efforts that way, till, satisfied that David spoke correctly when he said that it was perfectly useless, unless they could get a strong unenfeebled arm to handle the pick, and to strike with ; whereas their strength was as a child's. Then, the sound passing outwards, he showed them, would be lost in the larger and more open space ; while the sound passing in struck on a confined and bell-like

space, that gave the greatest effect to the stroke, which yet they could only just hear.

He warned them, too, that there must be a dense mass of rock or coal between them and the party who were working for their relief, to cause the sound to be so low.

This incident infused new life into the Deputy's attenuated and trembling frame. But his use of the recovery was again to summon heavenwards the wandering thoughts and hopes and desires of the captive men. He demanded that they should be prepared at all hazards for either fate. He would listen to no assurances of speedy relief; for, if he believed, he gained nothing but a temporary and perhaps illusive comfort. He was compelled to point out to them, that as their knocking could not be heard, the conclusion, sooner or later, might be that they were all dead, and further efforts useless. He did not also say—what, however, he could not but think—how vitally Israel Mort's pecuniary position must press upon him, and influence him to stop the moment he could feel justified.

On the whole Rees Thomas refused either to

believe or disbelieve, but was resolved as a Christian hero to wait till he knew the truth.

How long this knocking might have gone on no one could even guess. Of course every step nearer the deliverers made, the clearer and louder the knocking would become.

And so it proved hour by hour

It was then resolved that all the men should be taken into counsel, if only to stimulate their flagging vital powers, so that they might live till relief came.

Boundless was the hope, the confidence, of the men ; marvellous the effect in newly inspiring them ; fervid, indeed, the ensuing religious services, mixed, however, with an element of restless and agitating tumult, that hurt the Deputy till he found the reason :—

They wanted to be at the signal place, congregated together as near as they could get, to listen to the advance of the deliverers. It was as a dram to them, which they could not now live without.

And there they sat, hour by hour, and day by day, unwilling to move, except for the most positive necessities, and immediately returning to listen

to the music that thrilled through and possessed their whole souls—the measured strokes, yet far distant, of the friendly pick.

How dreadful to have to speak of their disenchantment!—of that fearful moment when on the fifth day of their captivity the accustomed tap was missed—when the excited watchers cried to each other: ‘Oh, it is but a temporary accident!’ and summoned all to be quiet.

They listened as men listen for the renewed beats of the heart of one dead, yet supposed still to be living,—their alarm, distress, agony, rising minute by minute.

And still time passed on, and there was no sign.

And when one, two, three days passed, and the pick was still unheard, then there was a general giving way; and men bent low their heads, and felt their hearts broken, as they waited only now for the signals of that other deliverer.—Death!

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHY THE SIGNALS STOPPED.

‘FOR me it never rains but it pours,’ said Israel, when the news of the inundation reached him; and that was his only verbal comment; but he set his teeth hard, and felt the fight betwixt himself and fate was now at its climax.

And with that thought, and the feeling that all men and all things were against him, his old stony hardness of spirit seemed to come back to him, and with that came all the old thirst to succeed—no matter at what cost, or through what obstacles.

So far as prudence and humanity went together, Israel was content to give full swing to the latter quality. So he set to work to get the mine emptied of the water as fast as possible, for that helped both aims.

But it was soon found that the pumps made no

way against the inundation. Higher and higher rose the water in the shaft, till Israel knew that all the lower parts of the mine were submerged, including the district where the explorers had been at work at the time of the occurrence of the newer and more dreadful calamity.

He said to every one from that time he was sure that not a living soul existed in the mine. Eight days had passed ; no life could exist there so long. And there can be no doubt he persuaded himself so strongly into that belief as to give it a kind of honesty.

Were it but for Rees Thomas's sake alone, however, he felt bound for some time to persevere with operations evidently directed to save the unfortunates below, if any really lived.

But at the same time, for his own sake, and to satisfy his creditors, and those from whom he hoped for aid, he went on with increased vigour, and new and more powerful appliances, to redeem the mine from the water ; expecting thus also to help to satisfy the popular craving for vigorous action.

But the craving was not to be stilled so easily.

The cry rose, and grew louder every day and every hour, that the people inside would have got to the high levels, would live there in the constant hope of being relieved, and that they ought to be relieved—they could be, they must be relieved, and some almost ventured to threaten Israel they should be relieved.

Many among the more clamorous of the colliers insisted that if Israel Mort chose he could open a route without encountering the waters of the inundation, by which to reach those higher parts where the living men would be surely found.

They also pointed out that those very parts were in close neighbourhood at one point to the stables, and to the store-places for oil and candles, so that they might get abundance of food, which, however unsuitable, would still preserve life.

While Israel appeared still obdurate, news was brought to him that a meeting was to take place at one of the neighbouring chapels, where Rees Thomas often preached, and where friends of his would be present, to show how cruel, nay, how criminal, was his—Mort's—conduct ; and to pro-

pose that a public and influential deputation should confront him at the mine.

Israel was shaken a little by this. His pecuniary position was so bad, and getting altogether so hopeless unless he could have the mine again at work, that to ask him to give money for experimentally humane purposes, was like asking him to give his blood, that he might die, and somebody else be nourished by it.

But he was shaken, where otherwise he would have been firm as adamant, by the thought of the Deputy; who had gone down for him, and in a spirit of so exalted a kind, that even Israel, stern as he seemed alike in exterior and heart, felt he could almost kneel down and worship him.

And when that first emotion died out, finding the soil so uncongenial, still he was haunted by thoughts of Rees Thomas that kept him in perpetual discomfort and self-war, and would not be driven off by Israel's old-world philosophy.

The fact was, he loved the man better, perhaps, than he loved any other human being (the missing David being for the time out of the

question), though the love might not amount to much, after all.

Still, when he found himself pressed upon at once by the half-maddened people who had relatives in the mine, and by his own conscience, he, after a terrible struggle at the prospect of utter ruin which this new effort and expense seemed to make more certain, gave orders on the eleventh day to proceed in the way desired.

Israel's plans showed two things: first, a ground-plan, by which he was able to tell the precise districts where alone safety could have been found; and, secondly, a vertical section, which told him the exact depth and degree of inclination that would be required to open a route, from a spot not far distant in an old mine which was readily accessible, to the supposed places of refuge.

The works were begun, and continued with seeming vigour: though there were many sharp critics who noticed how much more anxious Israel Mort was to get down into the mine the natural way—by getting rid of the water—than

to reach the interior by the new route, which ought to occupy but a short time to make.

Israel was wise in his generation; and knew well that even as regards pecuniary matters he could not afford to lose the good feeling of the neighbourhood; so he skilfully managed to do just so much as relieved him from any danger on that score, and resolutely refused in his own mind to go one jot beyond.

Signals—those heard by the imprisoned men—were kept up with extreme exactitude; and it must be owned, in simple justice to Israel, that if he had but received a reply at any time, or the slightest indication of the men being alive, he would have thrown selfish prudence to the wind; and have worked with might and main, and in the most generous spirit, in the hope to relieve the Deputy and his companions.

But he felt it hard to squander his little means in pursuit of an object that he was sure was impossible of attainment.

Then, too, a creditor interposed, and asked Israel if he knew whose money he was expending on these absurd attempts; and threatened, if

they were not discontinued, he would find a way to stop more than those particular works.

Israel listened, said nothing, and went on, but not for long.

He saw at last what he had waited for—conviction beginning to dawn upon the faces of the people who were hanging about the pit mouth, that all was over with the imprisoned men. Then, when just a fortnight had elapsed, he suddenly abandoned the works; and—characteristically—so destroyed what had been done by throwing back all the stuff that had been got out as to prevent any new cry being raised for their continued progress.

Then it was that the unhappy men inside noted the cessation of the signals, and saw they were finally abandoned.

There were no more complaints outside of Israel's conduct. No one reproached him—even in secret—except Israel's own self.

He suffered, he hardly knew why, intense anguish, as he saw all undone; and felt some enemy drive in upon him the fancy—‘What now, if the Deputy has been alive, after all, and hearing your

signals, and now has to digest as he may their silence?'

Israel would listen to no more of such absurd and sinister fancies. He rushed into work and scheming to see how, when the water was all out, he might enter with new hope of making the mine turn to profit.

And then it was that the sort of silent underground revolution of character that had been going on, however seemingly moveless, since his purchase of the mine from Griffith Williams, assumed a new and final phase, in a portentous discovery.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN ENEMY'S MESSAGE.

It was indeed a terrible revelation and retribution that awaited Israel Mort when he was summoned that night by Griffith Williams to come instantly to the Farm, on a matter of life and death that brooked no delay.

He was thunderstruck. What ! his old enemy—the man who had contributed by incessant litigation most seriously to cripple him in money matters—he send for him, and by a summons that seemed as if it was thought impossible that it could be challenged !

What could it mean ? David ? Did they know aught of him ? He was not in the mine ! No ; and, before he knew what he was doing, Israel thanked God with more than a father's natural fervour and gratitude that calamities of that nature at least were spared him.

Then, as he mused awhile whether he would or would not go, he saw all quite clear. Yes, that Mr. Knight—the young fellow he had felt so strongly drawn to—had won Nest's affections; and she had perhaps become alarmed at his not keeping an appointment, and fancied he was down in the mine, knowing probably what Israel himself knew, that he had intended to lead the explorers, till another mining engineer had offered, and simultaneously Mr. Knight had been recalled to London. Well, he was glad he could relieve Nest on that score.

So thinking, he reached the Farm; where, advancing to meet him, he saw Mr. Griffith Williams, who put out his hand in deep emotion as he said—

‘Israel, there are physical calamities so fearful that even wild beasts and those they prey on come together, and are for the moment, if not friends, certainly not enemies. As Christian men, cannot we somewhat improve upon this lesson, before I tell you that which must now be told?’

‘Is—it—so—serious?’ asked Israel, agitated, but controlling his agitation to the utmost of his

power, and speaking for that purpose with more than his usual deliberation.

‘Think the worst, and you will fall short of the truth.’

‘What do you wish me to do?’ asked Israel.

‘To forgive, before God and man, aught I may have done amiss to you, as I, before the same dread witnesses, forgive any wrong you may have done or meditated towards me.’

Israel, still cautious, seemed to weigh in his thought Griffith’s every word, as if to be quite sure there lurked no after mischief; and, being satisfied of that, held out his hand, saying—

‘On my soul, I accept that which you offer, and as you offer it.’

Then he paused, half turning away, as if the better to listen to what he was to hear, but which he did not attempt in any way to anticipate.

‘Come in-doors,’ said Griffith; and they both went in to that same light and cheerful room where Israel first made the squire’s personal acquaintance, but which was now ominously darkened. ‘Nest is there on the sofa. Strange to say, after being delirious for days and nights

together, now that you come, whom she so pined to see, she has just sunk to sleep, which under any other circumstance might yet lead to her recovery.'

'And these circumstances——?' said Israel in a voice harsher than Griffith had ever heard it—through the dryness of his throat, and a kind of terror that began to oppress him.

'Israel, it must be God's hand that has thus brought us together by links that neither of us can resist. Nest loves your son. They are devoted to each other. I knew nothing of it till quite recently, but it seems both our wives encouraged them in it, and now——' he stopped, as if unable or unwilling to proceed.

'And now you wish me to understand how far below her and you my son must be.'

'In heaven's name, Israel, be silent till you know more of that of which you speak. I thought you would understand, would guess——'

'Guess! What! Is David dead?'

'He is in the mine!'

'Madman! Unsay that, or I will choke the lie out of your very throat!' Then, as he saw the anguish in Griffith's face, he seemed to feel the

hour of retribution had come, and in the most fearful of shapes.

What! Could it be possible that David had heard those signals, had lived upon them for days—when nothing else would have kept him alive—and then had found them stop—stop by his, Israel's, command—leaving him, to the wonder and execration of posterity, as the murderer of his own son?

He stayed no further questions than sufficed to make clear, beyond possibility of doubt, that David was Mr. Knight, that he had gone down into the mine, and that Nest had only learned the fact three or four days ago, and gone out instantly as if to seek Israel or to go to the mine, but been brought back delirious by a crowd of women, from the pit-mouth.

Mr. Williams finished by saying that it was only to-day she had recovered so as to be able to make known the frightful truth.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ONCE MORE, DEAR FRIENDS, ONCE MORE !

HALF way between the Farm and the mine, Israel met the creditor who has been already mentioned, a Mr. Ingram, who had discounted bills for him. He was about to pass him by, not simply without stopping to speak, but as if he were altogether unconscious of his existence. But Mr. Ingram met him point-blank, and noticing the discourtesy, said roughly,

‘That bill’s due on Wednesday. Are you ready to meet it?’

‘No. It must be renewed. I cannot stop now. I must re-open that new route into the mine! They tell me my son is within!’

‘I don’t believe a word of it. And if he be, he must be dead, like the rest, as you know well.’

‘I will see to that.’

‘Mr. Mort, in one word, I positively forbid any further operations of that kind. You have owned there was no chance several days ago; others have said the same, and I look upon this as a mere subterfuge, intended for I know not what sinister purpose, except it be to squander other people’s money, and leave your debts unpaid.’

Israel looked at him, and for a moment Mr. Ingram’s eye quailed under the intensity and contempt of that gaze. But when he saw Israel meant to pass away without further speech, he said,

‘Choose, Mr. Mort. Let this matter alone, or if you do not, I’ll arrest you, I will, by God, if you dishonour the bill!’

Israel deigned no answer, but went his way.

That way was straight to the mine. There he stopped the pumps, and set every man at work to re-open the very ground he had deliberately closed.

When they had again reached the farthest point of their previous operations he began to form three distinct channels of communication leading

to as many different part of the district where alone refuge was possible.

He gave no reasons. He answered no questions, except he so answered them as to silence the questioners with fear of him. He neither sat down, nor slept, nor ate from that hour for days ; but pressed on the labourers cruelly, and if they resisted vindictively ; seeing nothing ever before him but that fearful mass of solid rock or coal that had to be pierced through, beyond the point reached before and beyond which was David, only David, for he forgot even the Deputy now, as well as all the other buried men.

The collier at the head of each party worked on with fierce effort, ceaselessly spurred by Israel's cry of—' Now then ! Now ! ' till exhausted, when he gave place to another.

The coal had all to be carried away in hand-baskets by a chain of men who reached from the actual hewers to a place where others removed it to the surface.

Once when a man in this chain caused a temporary delay in the transit of the basket, Israel struck him passionately with a stick ; but the

man made no sign of offence, and went on ; for he knew now what all were beginning to know, who was inside, and what was Israel's position.

The want of air—not simply fresh air, but any air—was a fearful obstacle as they advanced their narrow channels—narrow because they dared not take up time by making them an inch larger than was necessary. The workmen were compelled to stop at last, while ventilators were put up ; and those who saw Israel at that time were ever after accustomed to say, that anything more fearful—demoniacal—than Israel's face, they had never seen in life or in pictures.

And when the ventilators were at work the air at times was so bad that the lamps would only burn when kept in the line of the air-pipe, and very near.

Then as if to test Israel's powers of sanity and endurance to the utmost, the coal was found to get harder as they advanced, so that the effect of each stroke was pitiably small.

But at last, on the seventeenth day, and the third of their renewed effort, in which time work had been accomplished that would have required

a month even with the best and best-paid men under ordinary conditions the workers in one tunnel got fairly inside.

To find there solitude and silence, death and ruin.

They came first upon a part of a gnawed leather strap.

Then their steps were arrested by a group of four dead men, looking strangely placid, almost with a smile on their faces, their heads pillowed on their clothes : which were folded with such care and neatness as if the makers of the pillows were aware these would be the last they would ever make, and that from them they might hope to pass to the dearer pillow of Christ's breast.

Near this group of unfortunates, who had evidently not long been dead, and who seemed to have found consolation at the precise moment when they might have been expecting to suffer the last extremity of mortal pain, they picked up a candle-box, on which was inscribed by laborious indentation with an iron nail that lay close by, the words,

‘Dear mother, don’t fret, for I am singing the

praises of God !' He had died before he could add his name.

Going on they found the list of

'OUR DEAD,'

inscribed on the wall, with a date that showed it had been made only three days after Rees Thomas' descent into the mine.

Israel glanced at this death-list for a single moment, then turned away again to proceed.

But the others with him stood reading the list with beating hearts—no man knowing whose name dear to him he might not find there.

The water-marks were next discovered—long, horizontal white lines of chalk, stretching across the blackness of the coal—placed day by day to mark the rise or fall of the water.

But the climax of discovery, of agitation, of deep distress and sympathy seemed to be reached, alike for Israel and all, when he and they came to

THE MINER'S PSALM.

and as they read by the imperfect light of their shaking lamps such sentences as these—

‘Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps.

‘Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves.

‘I am shut up, and I cannot come forth.

‘Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.’

Israel knew the handwritings, first the Deputy’s, then, as his strength perhaps failed, Mr. Knight’s, that is to say, David’s.

That was the first moment during these days that Israel gave any sign that he even belonged to our common human nature. Stern, impenetrable as the rugged icebergs of a Siberian winter till now, now he began to melt and show signs of manhood. He spoke gently; tears were seen for the first time in his eyes; and when some kindly spirit among the men brought him food, and begged for all their sakes he would eat, he sat down and ate, and was refreshed.

Perhaps he would have refused even this indulgence but that he saw their search had for the

moment ended. Every accessible spot had been explored, and not a trace found of the bulk of the imprisoned men. It was well, therefore, he should take a few minutes for thought and study of his map.

One glance of that sent him to his feet, as if roused by an electric shock.

He tracked mentally the captives' course from the first mount of safety, the shelving slope of their Ararat, through the closed up stall [where David had so bravely fired the gas] to the still higher levels beyond; and he saw that if only they discovered the way through the dip, they might reach the best place of shelter the mine afforded, and where horse-flesh, oil, candles, were all obtainable.

Away he and his men went, through the very place David had discovered, and which was again foul with gas, that almost prostrated them as they crawled on hands and knees through it, away to the dip, which was once more full of water.

Had *they* found it shallow enough to pass through, Israel wanted to know. His wildest thoughts did not extend so far as to guess that

the party of wretched spectres could have gone under and through the water as it now was.

He did not even deem it worth while to try any schemes for him and his band to get through. It could only be attended by great hazard and infinite delays.

But he pointed out to his workmen a particular spot, and said—in the very spirit, and almost in the words of Henry V. to his soldiers at the siege of Harfleur—

“Once more, dear friends, unto the work! Once more!” I believe they are all there! Alive or dead they will surely be found there.’

But this, the eighteenth day, and the fourth of their severe labour, was one of almost intolerable suffering to the labourers. It frequently occurred that a man would go to the front as his turn came, and within two or three minutes pass to the rear utterly overcome.

Seeing this, and the loss of time it caused in passing and repassing by such narrow ways, which, however, fresh men behind continually enlarged Israel stopped work at the other two tunnels, which had still been going on, and drew his en-

tire strength of men together to the one that now was so full of promise.

Several times, hardly knowing why he did so, but most probably from the keen instincts of discipline and true leadership, Israel himself took up the pick, and continued for a time to work the vacated place.

No signals had been lately attempted, for there was no time. Every stroke, as it were swift or slow, might be saving or losing a life in the end. But on one of these occasions when Israel himself worked, before retiring to make way for a fresher man, he could not resist the temptation to call for deep silence, while he listened.

He knelt, then without looking round held up his hand behind him to check a whisper he heard.

He stooped lower, till his forehead touched the ground, then after half a minute or so he raised it a little, and put it against the face of the rock they were hewing away, and then again paused ; then he rose to his feet calmly, and said aloud,

‘ Men, they are there ! I hear them ! They

live! I ask you to thank God for them and for me!’

A shout of ecstasy was his first answer. Then while the workers of the moment felt a new life in their veins, a new strength in their limbs, all the rest of the colliers knelt down, while one prayed aloud.

For hours the monotonous yet agitating toil went on thus. No more signals were needed, for the voices within were constantly heard, and generally as engaged in the singing of hymns, or pouring forth short heartfelt ejaculations.

Israel was tempted once to stop the workers that he might listen and try if he could distinguish the voice of David, the long-lost son, thus—and thus only—found again! But he checked himself as he remembered that success in that would lead to no good, and must involve delay.

About daybreak of the nineteenth day a sort of communication was established by means of a boring-rod through the last few feet of rock.

With upraised hand Israel motioned to all for silence.

They did not need the warning. Each man

was suspending his breath as he thought of the first question that was about to be put.

Israel stooped to the rod, put his lips to it, and asked, mastering as well as he could the trembling of his voice,

‘ Who have you there ? ’

‘ Father ! ’ was the reply, and in listening to it there was not a single collier who did not feel awe-stricken at the intensity and the significance of meaning of both voices.

Israel covered his face with his hands and wept aloud.

Strength, fortitude, life seemed almost about to ebb from him then. He staggered about like a drunken man, or rather like one who has just emerged from the utter darkness of a dungeon into a scene of surpassing sunlight and glory. Presently he dropped on the earth, and there awaited, supine, whatever else was to follow.

Slow, tedious, but not unhappy hours followed before the first figure came forth.

‘ Father ! ’ it cried, looking confusedly round, and being unable, from the cruel privations to which it had been subjected, to stand without help.

Israel heard, and moved to rise, but before he could do so David was kneeling at his feet, and murmuring—all the boy back again in his soul—

‘It was the mine, father, parted us, it is the mine that gives us back again to each other. I am no coward now, unless it is cowardice to be frightened at the imputation.’

‘How got you here?’ Israel murmured.

‘Through the water in the dip.’

‘Whilst full?’

‘Yes. And then I let out the water for the rest to pass.’

‘Oh, my boy! my boy! How I have wronged thee!’

And father and son lay there in the darkened corner of the mine, hand pressed in hand, breast to breast, and both heedless for some time of aught in the world but each other.

But happiness brought back to Israel a new and more vivid sense of his affection for the Deputy; and gave new pangs to his remorse as he reflected that it was he—Israel—who had condemned him to death, and would have abided by the condemnation but for the discovery that one

still nearer and dearer to him had to share the Deputy's fate ; and then he had found the way to save both, with all those of their fellows who remained alive.

One by one these were brought slowly forth ; some apparently dying, two dead, the rest in such a state that no man could venture to say whether life or death had the fastest hold upon them.

Last, characteristically last, as a matter of course, came the Deputy. Not till he saw his whole flock safely gathered together into a place of safety would he quit the place of his captivity.

He was brought forth by two men, quite unable to stand, scarcely able to speak.

But the smile that passed across his face, when he saw, by the lamp-light, David and Israel together, was one that would ever haunt both through their whole lives with the sense of its sweetness—its expressiveness, and which he could but feebly rival in his words :—

‘I lived but for this, and lo, it is accomplished. Now, O Lord, let me go to my eternal rest !’

‘Rees Thomas,’ murmured Israel, ‘I too am feeble, and hardly able to bear up under the gift that I owe, under God, to thee; but——’

‘Under God! dost thou say so?’

Israel did not reply to that in words, but the grasp of the hand, and the look in Israel’s wonder-stricken eyes, told that the incident had done its work. Israel, the strong man, was changed, but would still be strong.

‘I was about to say to thee, Rees Thomas, if there be one thing in the world that David and I now need, it is thee.’

Rees Thomas gazed long and wistfully in Israel’s eyes, till his own overflowed, and his face became very sad. The head was then shaken, as if to say, ‘it could not be,’ and then bent low on his breast.

‘Live, live, my friend! my second father!’ urged David. ‘Live for my sake and his! Call upon the will and the faith thou hast so often and so wonderfully made use of!’

Presently the Deputy again looked up, and said inquiringly,

‘My wife?’

‘Has gone before!’ said Israel, after a long and agitating pause.

‘And—the—boy?’

‘Is my care henceforth,’ said David, ‘He shall share, if need be, everything I possess in the world.’

Again the Deputy bent low his head, in silent and anguished self-communion.

A few seconds passed thus, before his eye again sought their faces.

‘Friends,’ he began, and his voice then told them his position was hopeless even to himself, and therefore probably fatal, ‘how I have loved you both, how striven for both—striven! ay, even with the Angel of God, as Jacob did in the desert, thou wilt hereafter know—and am I not now repaid? What is death? Can he banish you from me? Does he not even now feel we are conquerors over him—you and me? But—but—what was it I wanted to say? I get strangely forgetful. Where am I? The world surely gets darker as it gets older! Who spake? Why it was my wife. I wondered she did not come to me. Yes, dearest, it is all over now.

All! The suffering's past—the fruits all to come. Oh the rich harvest! You cannot hear me! Cannot understand me! Ah! is it so? That is hard to bear. Forgive me. I was always weak of frame, perhaps too of soul, and wanted some one to lean on. That has been my cross, I suppose. Did you not then know I was dying? But death is sweet with those you love. Tell Israel——'

What was to be told remained for death's ear only.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ISRAEL'S CHOICE.

ON reaching the surface once more, Israel and David found Mr. Griffith Williams waiting most anxiously their appearance.

The news of Israel's success had preceded him ; and in consequence there had been time to make arrangements for the special care of him and his son.

A grasp of the hand of Israel, then of that of David, said all that needed to be said as to the relations of Griffith Williams with both.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘my carriage waits for you, my wife waits for you, Nest waits for you. I entreat you to be silent, to let me have my own way. Everything is prepared for you. You can be nowhere else cared for so well.’

Israel hesitated a moment ; the revolution in things was too vast, too sudden for him to be able to comprehend it as he could wish, but a glance at David's emaciated face but earnest pleading eyes made him hesitate no more.

'Be it as you please, Mr. Williams.' He was about to ask a question concerning the Deputy, but Griffith Williams anticipated him :—

'Everything that can be done to show how we all honour the memory of Rees Thomas and his wife shall be done. Rest assured of that. I have already given all necessary directions.

Israel's look of gratitude was sufficient answer. Then as the carriage drove slowly away, he and David reclining against each other, shut their eyes, and strove to regain a little of their lost strength and energy, if it were but enough to enable them to appreciate and enjoy the blessedness of so great a change.

Some days pass, and once more we are at the Farm, and in the darkened chamber.

Nest is there still, but better. David is on the

floor by her feet, and recounting his adventures, with pallid, thin, but most happy face.

A little removed from them, standing by the windows, are Griffith Williams and Israel engaged in a discussion just drawing to its end. It is Israel who now speaks :—

‘I give up the mine to you, since you say you are willing, for my sake, to take it with all its debts, responsibilities, and——’

‘Yes,’ said Griffith interruptingly, ‘I will do so, for your sake ; and not for that only, but also because I believe, with David’s help in bringing other capitalists to join, so that I may run no risks injurious to my family, the affair may still be made profitable, and the mine safe. You do not doubt that?’

‘Not in the least.’

‘That decides me. But of course you stay in the concern.’

‘You wish that?’

‘Wish it? I will not meddle on any other understanding.’

‘I am glad of this,’ said Israel, with a smile

that had positively grown sweet; 'for power demoralises us for subjection. With you I should not feel to bristle with pride whenever my toes were trodden on by my superiors; whereas——'

'What do you mean? I am not going to be the manager.'

'Neither am I.'

'Why, did you not just now consent?'

'I consented, and do again consent, with gratitude, to accept from you, if you will confer it on me, while you retain the power, my old post of Overman.'

'Overman! Israel, are you mad?'

'I have been mad, and worse than mad. But if I have indeed recovered sanity, this must be to me my first assurance of it, that you can safely confide to me the post I ask.'

'Israel!'

'Words are vain in this matter. I do not wish to roam through the world a friendless man. Let me stay here. I will do you all good service; but I swear to you these are my only terms. I

have had my opportunity, and have abused it ; let me pay the penalty.'

'You do not object to David's marrying Nest ?'

'Not if you and she can bear to know without impatience he is my son.'

'That's settled then ; and they shall be married the instant she has entirely regained her health ; for I have a shrewd suspicion that the knowledge of this will wonderfully accelerate the process.'

'Farewell, then. I have made all necessary arrangements for the mine during my absence.'

'You are going away ?'

'Yes, for a brief time. I need to be alone, and yet not alone. He, of whom David will tell you so much, goes with me—not in the flesh, but in the spirit. It seems to me I have learned nothing in a long life, and I do not wish to die with the same reproach on my soul.

'I take him and his one book, that he has carefully and formally bequeathed to me ; I need not tell you what book that is. I take these, and intend to try if there be any path open to one like

me out of the darkness and the slough of despond in which I stand. Farewell! I will find the way if I am yet the man I was—Israel Mort, Overman.'

APPENDIX.

THE Author of 'Israel Mort, Overman,' desires at the close of his work to offer a suggestion as to the most important of the steps remaining to be taken before the miner can realise the full beneficence, justice, and wisdom of Mr. Bruce's late measure, in the increased safety and wholesomeness of his labour.

In a matter involving such tremendous issues, occasional inspection is simply worthless, except to show at distant intervals of time the then general state of the mine. What the collier wants to know is—not what the government inspectors will think of his colliery at some future day, but whether on *this* day—*this* very hour—he can go on with his work in entire confidence, no matter in what part of the mine he may happen to be.

Let then the men of each mine elect from among themselves (certain preliminary qualifications being understood) three of their own number, from which

the employer shall choose one, to be a Men's Inspector ; and paid by the State, even if the State demand repayment from the mine-owners. Let this man have no other duty than that of constant examination on the collier's behalf as regards the safety of the mine, and its fitness for working in.

Let him have a Deputy, if there be night work, as it is believed is now generally the case, so that the watching and the labour may always go on together. Let his election be subject to the approval of the government inspector, who will have to be satisfied of his fitness. Let his powers be confined absolutely to that of free communication, whenever he wishes, with the officers of the mine, deputies, overmen, or agents, according to the importance of what he may have to say ; and in case he cannot satisfy them, to do what he thinks requisite, let him (if he considers the case sufficiently urgent) be empowered to demand the immediate attendance of the government inspector. In less important cases his reports would of course be examined at certain intervals by the government inspector, who would then act as he saw fit. Meantime the value of such reports, and the amount of attention paid to them by the mine officers, would become important elements of judgment for or against the employer in cases of calamity. Such a men's inspector would of course practically, in time, come to represent not only the men, but to some extent the inspector

appointed by government, and therefore it would only be reasonable to require he should not belong to a Trades Union.

Let our working colliers be thus guarded, *and to a great extent thrown on their own responsibility to show if aught be wrong in the matter of their safety*; let the personal responsibility of the employer or his agent as demanded by the Act, be also systematically enforced, and there will soon be an end to mining accidents, except as calamities of the rarest kind.

It can hardly be necessary to urge how masters and workmen would be alike benefited by such an appointment:—it would infuse new life into the youth of every colliery, who would be emulous to obtain such a post, and educate themselves accordingly; it would give the older men the feeling that they were respected, and so promote their own self-respect; it would in all sorts of ways give a more genial tone to the mutual relation. As to the masters, such an appointment would virtually lessen their responsibility as honest men who wish to conduct the mine only on principles and methods consistent with safety and reasonable comfort for the workers, even while seemingly greater responsibilities are thrown upon them by the new legislation. Then, too, such an appointment, combined with the other recent measures of amelioration of mining life, and with the progress of practical science, would not only tend to spare employers the loss, alarm, and scandal

now excited by such regularly-recurring calamities (a thousand men a year killed for instance) but also to lessen the dislike of the occupation; and thus to do away with the greatest and ever-growing difficulty of mine-owners, that of finding a sufficient and permanently reliable supply of good and contented labourers.

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